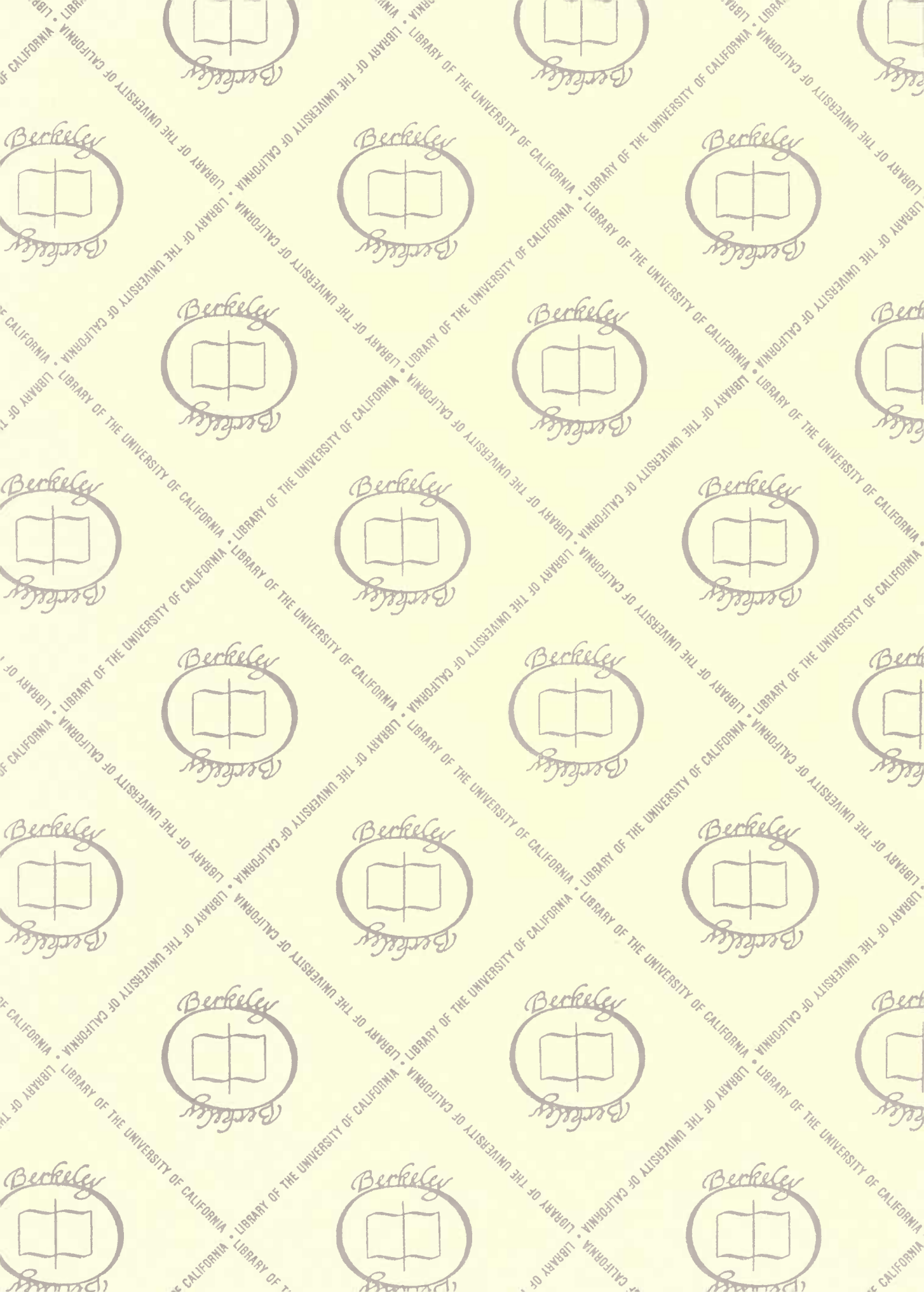


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Women in Politics Oral History Project

HELEN GAHAGAN DOUGLAS PROJECT

Volume IV

CONGRESSWOMAN, ACTRESS, AND OPERA SINGER

Helen Gahagan Douglas

An Interview Conducted by
Amelia Fry
1973, 1974, 1976

Underwritten by grants from:

National Endowment for the Humanities, Rockefeller Foundation,
Members and Friends of the Los Angeles Democratic Women's Forum

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HELEN GAHAGAN DOUGLAS

TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Helen Gahagan Douglas -- Volume IV --
Congresswoman, Actress, and Opera Singer

PREFACE	i
INTRODUCTION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
INTERVIEW HISTORY	ix
I BACKGROUND AND CHILDHOOD	1
Forebears: A Tradition of Land	1
The Gahagan Engineering Corporation	6
Mother and the Art of Living	16
Girlhood: Home and School in Brooklyn	27
Father's Opposition to a Theatrical Career	33
II ESTABLISHING A DRAMATIC CAREER AND BEGINNING POLITICAL WORK	38
To Barnard College and the Theater	38
From Drama to Opera	43
Marriage and the Move to California	48
Concert Tour Collides With Nazis, 1937	49
First Political Activities	53
Democratic Party Work: Three Jobs, One Woman	61
III IN CONGRESS	77
Running for Congress, 1944	77
Campaigning	80
Setting up Home and Office in Washington	87
Stands Taken in Congress: Domestic	101
Postwar Price Controls	101
Other Postwar Readjustment Measures	104
Relationships with Lobbyists	107
Compiling the History of the Negro Soldier	110
Employing the First Negro Secretary on the Hill in a White Office	113
The Roosevelt Redwood Forest Bill	117
Reclamation and the 160-Acre Limitation	120
Peacetime Draft	125
Cancer Control	125
Real Estate Lobby Investigation	127
Equal Rights Amendment	127
Women in Congress	128
Tax Reform	131

Civil Liberties in Congressional Committees	132
FEPC and the Southerners' Tactics	133
Red-Baiting in Congress	135
Veterans	139
Stands Taken in Congress: Foreign Affairs Committee	140
Atomic Power	140
United States Military Aid Versus Using the United Nations	146
A State of Israel in Palestine	150
The Marshall Plan	153
The 1948 Elections	156
Assessing the Responsibilities and Rewards of the Years in Congress	162
IV THE 1950 SENATORIAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST RICHARD M. NIXON	168
General Campaign Observations	168
The Reclamation Issue	171
The Tidelands Oil Issue	178
Perspectives on the Papers of the Campaign	183
January 27, 1950 Talk With Truman	183
Catholics	184
Campaign Funds	186
Tactics Versus Issues	189
Reaction to the Nixon Tactics	190
Comparison With Other Nixon Campaigns	195
Moves on the Douglas Side	197
Forcing an Earl Warren Endorsement of Nixon	198
Roosevelt Name-Dropping by Nixon	201
Democrats and the Campaign	202
The Loyalty Question	203
Campaigning by Helicopter	207
Response to the "Pink Sheet"	208
The Media	210
A Silver Set for a Nixon Plug	211
The Aftermath of the Campaign	212
The Decision Against Litigation	212
Public Response	215
Comments on Watergate	216
Back to Family Life	217
Additional Reflections on the Campaign	218
Future Leader of Pakistan on the Campaign	218
Paying the Campaign Debts	221
Campaign Organization	225
Perceptions of Nixon's Strategy in 1950	228
V REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF CAREER AND FAMILY	233
Reading Emily Dickinson	233
Sources of Douglas's Independence	236
Independence and Commitment in Marriage	241

Meshing Two Careers	245
Working in the Theater Under Melvyn's Direction	249
Comparison of Directors and Productions	250
VI AFTER 1950--PUBLIC WORK AND A VERMONT HOME	264
The American Christian Palestine Committee	264
Campaigning for Other Democrats	265
Working with Adlai Stevenson and Dean Acheson at the United Nations	267
Working in the Kennedy Campaign	271
Writing a Book About Eleanor Roosevelt	273
The Advisory Committee on Agricultural Labor	276
Friendship With Helen Fuller	281
Painting for Pleasure	285
Trip to the USSR With the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1964	289
Home in Vermont	300
Childhood Summers at Lake Morey, Vermont	300
Vermont Politics	307
Remodeling the Gahagan House	312
Attachment to Vermont	315
TAPE GUIDE	324
APPENDIX I - Partial Gahagan Family Genealogy	325
APPENDIX II - "My Democratic Credo"	328
APPENDIX III - Douglas-Marcantonio Voting Record [The Pink Sheet]	335
APPENDIX IV - Helen Gahagan Douglas Letter to Peter Edson/Scripps-Howard Newspapers, September 19, 1956	336
APPENDIX V - Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives Resolution of Esteem and Good Wishes Extended to Hon. Helen Gahagan Douglas	337
APPENDIX VI - Obituaries	340
APPENDIX VII - Memorial Service for Helen Gahagan Douglas, December 2, 1980	344
INDEX	345

PREFACE

The following interview is one of a series of tape-recorded memoirs in the California Women Political Leaders Oral History Project. The series has been designed to study the political activities of a representative group of California women who became active in politics during the years between the passage of the woman's suffrage amendment and the current feminist movement--roughly the years between 1920 and 1965. They represent a variety of views: conservative, moderate, liberal, and radical, although most of them worked within the Democratic and Republican parties. They include elected and appointed officials at national, state, and local governmental levels. For many the route to leadership was through the political party--primarily those divisions of the party reserved for women.

Regardless of the ultimate political level attained, these women have all worked in election campaigns on behalf of issues and candidates. They have raised funds, addressed envelopes, rung doorbells, watched polls, staffed offices, given speeches, planned media coverage, and when permitted, helped set policy. While they enjoyed many successes, a few also experienced defeat as candidates for public office.

Their different family and cultural backgrounds, their social attitudes, and their personalities indicate clearly that there is no typical woman political leader; their candid, first-hand observations and their insights about their experiences provide fresh source material for the social and political history of women in the past half century.

In a broader framework their memoirs provide valuable insights into the political process as a whole. The memoirists have thoughtfully discussed details of party organization and the work of the men and women who served the party. They have analysed the process of selecting party leaders and candidates, running campaigns, raising funds, and drafting party platforms, as well as the more subtle aspects of political life such as maintaining harmony and coping with fatigue, frustration, and defeat. Perceived through it all are the pleasures of friendships, struggles, and triumphs in a common cause.

The California Women Political Leaders Oral History Project has been financed by both an outright and a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Matching funds were provided by the Rockefeller Foundation for the Helen Gahagan Douglas component of the project, by the Columbia and Fairtree Foundations, and by individuals who were interested in supporting memoirs of their friends and colleagues. In addition, funds from the California State Legislature-sponsored Knight-Brown Era Governmental History Project made it possible to increase the research and broaden the scope of the interviews in which there was

a meshing of the woman's political career with the topics being studied in the Knight-Brown project. Professors Judith Blake Davis, Albert Lepawsky, and Walton Bean have served as principal investigators during the period July 1975-December 1977 that the project was underway. This series is the second phase of the Women in Politics Oral History Project, the first of which dealt with the experiences of eleven women who had been leaders and rank-and-file workers in the suffrage movement.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons significant in the history of the West and the nation. The Office is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, Director of The Bancroft Library. Interviews were conducted by Amelia R. Fry, Miriam Stein, Gabrielle Morris, Malca Chall, Fern Ingersoll, and Ingrid Scobie.

Malca Chall, Project Director
Women in Politics Oral History Project

Willa Baum, Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

15 November 1979
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Interviews in Process

Marjorie Benedict, Pauline Davis, Ann Eliaser, Elinor R. Heller, Lucile Hosmer, Emily Pike, Carmen Warschaw, Mildred Younger.

The Helen Gahagan Douglas Component of the California Women Political Leaders
Oral History Project

Volume I: *The Political Campaigns*

Discussion primarily of the 1950 Senate campaign and defeat, in interviews with Tilford E. Dudley, India T. Edwards, Leo Goodman, Kenneth R. Harding, Judge Byron F. Lindsley, Helen Lustig, Alvin P. Meyers, Frank Rogers, and William Malone.*

Volume II: *The Congress Years, 1944-1950*

Discussion of organization and staffing; legislation on migrant labor, land, power and water, civilian control of atomic energy, foreign policy, the United Nations, social welfare, and economics, in interviews with Juanita E. Barbee, Rachel S. Bell, Albert S. Cahn, Margery Cahn, Evelyn Chavoor, Lucy Kramer Cohen, Arthur Goldschmidt, Elizabeth Wickenden Goldschmidt, Chester E. Holifield, Charles Hogan, Mary Keyserling, and Philip J. Noel-Baker.

Volume III: *Family, Friends, and the Theater: The Years Before and After Politics*

Discussion of Helen and Melvyn Douglas and their activities at home with their family and among friends, and their work in the theater and movies, in interviews with Fay Bennett, Alis De Sola, Cornelia C. Palms, and Walter R. Pick.

Volume IV: *Congresswoman, Actress, and Opera Singer*

Helen Gahagan Douglas discusses her background and childhood; Barnard College education; Broadway, theater and opera years; early political organization and Democratic party work; the congressional campaigns, supporters; home and office in Washington; issues during the Congress years, 1944-1950; the 1950 Senate campaign against Richard M. Nixon, and aftermath; women and independence; occupations since 1950; speaking engagements, travel to Russia, South America, Liberia inauguration, civic activities, life in Vermont.

*William Malone preferred not to release his transcript at this time.

INTRODUCTION

Helen Gahagan Douglas, one of the most notable women to grace the American artistic and political scenes during the past half-century, died of cancer in June 1980 at the age of eighty. Despite frequent hospitalization and progressive weakness during the last several years of her life, she courageously refused drugs to ease her pain, preferring to keep her mind clear so that she could remain close to her family; so that she, among other activities, could speak to a congressional hearing in Washington by phone on behalf of cancer research; so that she could organize assistance programs for children in New York City; and so that she could complete her autobiography. She insisted on living as fully as possible until the disease overtook her. A year before her death, she received a Medal of Distinction from her alma mater Barnard College, for her "fearless, lifetime devotion to the cause of political, racial and religious freedoms and for instructing us in citizenship, in responsibility and in service to ideals and country."

Within her lifetime, three generations of Americans came to know Helen Douglas. First a generation knew her as a beautiful and highly talented stage and movie actress whose storybook romance with fellow actor Melvyn Douglas culminated in a marriage that lasted nearly fifty years. She then picked up another generation when, taking leave of her career as an actress, she devoted her energies, her intelligence, and her charisma to politics. She was Democratic National Committeewoman for California (1940-1944), vice-chair of the California Democratic party in charge of its women's division (1942-1944), Congresswoman from California (1944-1950), and an alternate delegate to the United Nations General Assembly (1946).

During these ten years she pled the cause of the poor and helpless, especially the migrant farm worker, fought successfully for civilian control of atomic energy, and argued the case for improved international relations. In 1950 she lost a hard-fought campaign for Senate to Richard Nixon and disappeared from public attention. She and Melvyn moved to New York and Vermont, where she continued to study and lecture about those issues to which she had always been committed—human rights and world peace. And as always, her activities involved her family and many close and devoted friends.

After the advent of Watergate in 1972 the media sought her out to appraise Richard Nixon in light of her experiences. Thus a third generation was introduced to the legendary Helen Gahagan Douglas.

This volume is one of four that comprise the Helen Gahagan Douglas Unit of the California Women Political Leaders Oral History Project, a unit to document the career of this leading humanitarian and political figure.

In 1974 the Regional Oral History Office received a grant and a matching grant offer from the National Endowment for the Humanities to develop a series of biographical interviews with women who had held leadership positions in

California politics between 1920 and 1965. Helen Gahagan Douglas, one of the best known women in California politics during that period, was among those listed as potential interviewees. Recognizing Helen Douglas's historicity, the Rockefeller Foundation agreed to a match to fund Helen Gahagan Douglas's interview with the proviso that the project include persons who had been associated with her.

The Helen Gahagan Douglas oral history unit, as it ultimately evolved, was comprised of Helen Douglas and twenty-five men and women who had known her as a friend and/or associate at important bench marks in her life--in college, the theater, and during and following her active political career.

Mrs. Douglas assisted in the selection of these representative persons whom she thought would provide useful and objective information about her activities throughout her life. In addition to the interviews in the Helen Gahagan Douglas Unit, other women in the series discussed her in their own interviews; former associates Paul Taylor and Judge Oliver Carter had talked about her previously in their oral histories.

During the years between 1974 when the project was initiated and its completion in 1981, inflation cut deeply into the initial grants, requiring the office to seek additional funding. To the rescue came members and friends of the Democratic Women's Forum in Los Angeles, an organization which Helen Douglas helped to establish in the mid-forties. Later the National Endowment and the Rockefeller Foundation gave additional grants.

The project has depended on the efforts of a number of persons. Interviewers were Amelia Fry, Eleanor Glaser, Fern Ingersoll, Ingrid Scobie, and Malca Chall. Catherine Scholten prepared the lengthy, much-emended Douglas transcript for typing, and also selected the photographs and appendix material. Teresa Allen helped develop the plan to keep track of the interviews from transcribing through final typing. Marie Herold was responsible for preparing the indexes, and for tying up the countless loose ends which are always present in long-term projects.

The material contained in these volumes and others in the California Women Political Leaders Oral History Project should provide students with fresh information and insights into the life and political and social milieu of Helen Douglas. Those seeking additional information will find it in the Helen Gahagan Douglas papers in the Carl Albert Congressional Research Center at the University of Oklahoma, and in the collections of Melvyn Douglas papers in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and Indiana University. In this latter collection Ingrid Winther Scobie plans to deposit the tapes of interviews she has conducted while preparing for her upcoming biography of Mrs. Douglas. The Roosevelt library also contains much source material on Helen Douglas, her friendship with the Roosevelts and other leading New Dealers, and her activities in the Democratic party.

Fortunately for historians these interviews in the Douglas unit were completed just prior to the recent deaths of Helen Gahagan Douglas, Albert Cahn, Charles Hogan, Alvin Meyers, and Walter Pick. The Regional Oral History Office is grateful for the financial support of the foundations and the friends of Helen Gahagan Douglas, and for the assistance of the hardworking staff, factors which have made possible this oral history project about an active and influential participant in an important era of American history.

Malca Chall, Project Director
Women in Politics Oral History Project

Willa Baum, Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

8 June 1981
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On behalf of future scholars the Office wishes to thank the friends of Helen Gahagan Douglas who responded to the request for funds sponsored by the Los Angeles Democratic Women's Forum, especially Marie Melgaso and Elizabeth Snyder who spearheaded that effort. These contributions helped match the grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Rockefeller Foundation, thereby making possible the production of the Helen Gahagan Douglas Unit of the California Women Political Leaders Oral History Project.

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

DATES OF SESSIONS: From April 4, 1973 to September 14, 1976

PLACES OF SESSIONS: Friends' homes in Santa Barbara and San Francisco, the Douglasses' apartment in New York, and their lakeside home in Vermont

THOSE PRESENT: Mrs. Douglas and the interviewer, Amelia Fry

Helen Gahagan Douglas is best known in the popular mind as the 1950 senatorial candidate whom Richard M. Nixon beat. That campaign cracked Earl Warren's monolithic hold on Republican politics in California and set in motion an internecine power struggle among Nixon, Lieutenant Governor Goodwin Knight, and senior Senator William F. Knowland, a tug of war which eight years later disintegrated the Republicans and allowed the Democrats to sweep state elections. But while there is an assured place in history for one whose defeat contributed to Nixon's rise to the Senate and thence eventually to the White House and the century's grand tangent of Watergate, Helen Douglas's true significance is neither that simple nor that limited. Her life history rests on the granite pillars of her own three careers; taken chronologically, they are Broadway actress, opera singer, and member of Congress. This interview and the series of which it is a part attempts to cover her tri-partite domain.

There are many who helped in the preparation of these interviews. First, at the Western Collection at the University of Oklahoma at Norman the archivists, with Helen Douglas's permission, graciously opened her then-uncatalogued papers, made available photocopying of selected documents for later sharing with Helen, and even permitted research after closing hours as long as some staff was still working. On the Berkeley campus, Professors Henry May and Travis Bogard provided leads and helped form the backbone for lines of questioning that would fit Helen's meteoric 1920s stardom on Broadway into the broader history of theater. Professor Paul Taylor lent us his copy of the "Blue Book," a list of bills with Helen's stand on each as a congresswoman, data used in a vain effort to counteract Nixon's claim in 1950 that she voted consistently with communists. Professor Taylor also not only provided background in his own oral history that included the 160-acre limitation issue so important in Helen's work, but he was willing to advise us on that issue's implications for questions about farm workers and land ownership patterns. Malca Chall, then recording Paul Taylor's oral history, also was "on call" for bibliographic help and, as director of the California Women Political Leaders oral history project, on continuing assistance for the

Helen Douglas preparations. Finally, Helen herself shared collections of theater notices, travel notes (such as on the South American trip), and other papers that were in closets at her Lake Morey house in Vermont and in the New York apartment at the time of the interviews. These are now destined for the University of Oklahoma.

The geographic mobility of Helen and Melvyn Douglas led to a rather creative plan of taping. The interviewer, too, was traveling during this period, so that sessions were scheduled as close as possible to the intersections of our orbits. Beginning in Santa Barbara, California, at the home of friends of the Douglases, locations also included two summertime stints at the family compound on Lake Morey in Fairlee, Vermont; a couple of visits to the Douglases' apartment at 50 Riverside Drive, New York City; one at the home of fellow oral historians Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun in San Francisco, the latter to provide a photogenic background for the thirty-minute video tape that was filmed by the University of California Television Office; and one in Monterey, California, in the home of her long-time friend Connie Flavin Palms and her husband Francis. No interviewing was done in the winters because the Douglases usually were out of reach at Guadalajara, Mexico. One of the planning sessions on editing and construction was squeezed in during Helen's visit in Millbrae with her friend India Edwards, former vice-president of the Democratic National Committee.

Interviewing Helen was like being pulled inside a brilliant kaleidoscope of color fragments. The experience would begin when she met me at the door generally wearing a bright, primary color--a long cotton dress of sunshine yellow or a Mexican tunic the hue of Lake Morey on a bright day. In either case, her incredibly blue eyes flashed a smile that seemed to refract the colors. There was never much time wasted on time-of-day frivolities. It was instant, full communication in declarative sentences and the perfect diction of one who loved her early training. "Your bag (of papers) is much too heavy for you to be carrying around. You'll ruin your back. Put it down. What on earth is in it?" In that case, it held photocopies of some Nixon and Douglas campaign documents from the University of Oklahoma. Or, "Can you stay at least three or four days here at the lake? I am working on my autobiography and we can go over that, too. Also, Philip Noel-Baker is here and you must interview him."

Color, too, flashed at one from the walls, in the oils that Helen painted in what must have been rare times of relaxation. Whatever the subject of the painting--birds, the view from the expansive wrap-around porch of the Victorian lakeside house, or an abstract expression--it was always a vigorous movement of energy in bright colors. But emblazoning her narrative with the emotional drama that she felt at the time an event took place is the major heritage she leaves for scholars who strain at the constrictions of black-and-white prose.

At our first session we spent the morning going over her outline. On a legal-sized tablet and in inch-high writing, she had sketched out the main milestones and major issues of her life. She would add to this occasionally at later interviews, as more questions spun off her papers and, sometimes, from interviews with others, friends and opponents, that the office was then conducting for the Helen Gahagan Douglas Unit of the women political leaders project. Offtape she discussed what she had found as the themes of her life, which would serve as selection agents for what to include in the recorded memoir as well as for the construction of the autobiography she was writing for Doubleday. There were continuities she found that stretched over her life history, such as her love for rural land values, in spite of having been a city girl. Milestones like the first time she could remember finding herself separated from her home and alone--the night the house burned in the next block and she was drawn to the drama. Helen conjured up the old memories, tried out various structures, and eventually ordered them for a more cohesive presentation.

Her work was intense and wholehearted. In Vermont one summer when Melvyn was home relaxing between films, Helen and I would work upstairs in the studio for hours, then reappear into his world feeling as if we had been submerged in an environment as total as the lake itself. "I have no brakes," Helen used to say, referring to her lifelong habit of going full blast until suddenly having to stretch out and rest. By the time I appeared in her life, there was always a pause in what everyone was doing to gather for a drink and the evening news. Melvyn's commentary on the events of the day punctuated the commercials, and here, incidentally, was little disagreement between husband and wife.

In the recording sessions she went at a fast clip, trying to get in as much as possible from the outline we had agreed upon. Because she was doing the two projects at once--the book autobiography and the oral history--she researched, synthesized, and no doubt mentally sketched the verbal content before taping. Somehow, there was an underlying excitement that surfaced in dealing with the past challenges and triumphs in her life--for example, her father's opposition to her acting career, not unlike the later example of the Democratic party faction that opposed her running for Senate. I believe she drew much of her energy from her sensitivity to the drama in real life, its turning points, its timing of events, and its conflicts. Exceeding "the play is the thing," the struggle was an exciting, activating force.

Her drive for victory over obstacles was visible in miniature or in metaphors as we worked together. Just as she had suddenly dropped the stardom of her stage career to train her voice for opera, she never seemed seriously to contemplate or prepare for possible defeat; her expectation of success was always, "of course." Once in her New York apartment my largest suitcase split apart just as I was leaving for the airport. Two minutes later we each had our heads over the broken zipper, needles and thread going in and out, Helen almost simultaneously called the doorman to direct the taxi

driver to the drug store nearby. She called the drug store to have a roll of wire tape ready to hand to us at the curb. I was to tape the bag en route. The scenario went off exactly as planned.

A wetter and more picturesque episode occurred during our interview at the historic house of the Palms' in Monterey. Francis Palms interrupted us with the news that his architecture studio, which is one wing of the house, was filling rapidly with water from the bathroom. Mrs. Palms, the one who knew the whereabouts of such things as mops and old towels, was downtown, but Helen's instincts took her out the back door where she began distributing buckets, mops, and rags to us and organizing the soak-squeeze-and-mop procedure. It was a no-nonsense, no-giggles venture until the floor was once again dry; then she wiped her hands, we all laughed at the irony of a chief restoration architect having a flood in his own house, and we returned to the interview without further ado. The scenario seemed somewhat remarkable for an individual who had had servants from childhood, a woman who had not grown up "helping Ma around the house."

Because the interview sessions and the preparation for each usually stretched over two or three days, we had many meals together. Even though Helen insisted that her cooking ability left most meals to her daughter, Mary Helen, Helen could cook a delicious roast chicken. In New York the service was with silver and candlelight; in Vermont, in the large open room lately added with plenty of windows on the lake, the meal was more informal. The second summer a new cook stove graced the capacious kitchen, and Helen explained with a laugh that Melvyn had to operate it for her. Nonetheless, it was her evening gesture to Melvyn to prepare fresh steamed spinach as a side dish every dinner. After dinner--if (in Vermont) a local woman had not come in to cook the dinner and clean up--we cleaned up, then worked a little while after dinner and before bedtime. Usually there was another guest due, dovetailing my visit.

As Helen's health grew more precarious, she continued to work at as fast a pace as possible. By the time cancer had reappeared (she had been through one bout of surgery), our recordings were finished, I had edited the transcripts and sent sections to Helen. Her sense of responsibility for finishing the oral history was heroic, with all the effects of chemotherapy that that implies. As soon as she was able to do so after a treatment, she was back at correcting and editing--and helping in community work in Harlem or lending her name and amazing (even when diminished) pool of energy to some Democrat's campaign in New York.

On the transcript she made several revisions of some sections, such as the section on congressional bills and issues. Life in the U.S. Congress is always difficult to reconstruct because of the rapidly-moving complexities and pressures. As she located more notes and bills from those days in the House, she made corrections and rewrote much of it. She was committed that it be as accurate as possible. Likewise, the first chapters--her childhood--were labored over as she consolidated those events, from many, that seemed

closest to her sense of developing themes and important milestones. But in that interview at the end about her summers in Vermont from childhood onward, and on her marriage, the conversation seemed to possess a natural coherence of its own. Perhaps it was because we were under the spell of golds and reds of the oncoming autumn as we sat in the large, windowed room and watched the lake change expressions. Perhaps it was because the rest of the family had gone on to New York and Helen and I were alone, to close up the the house for the oncoming cold. Whatever the reason those special memories come through vividly and unrevised.

Helen returned the last section December 5, 1979. She died June 28, 1980. Office editor Catherine Scholten then went through the entire manuscript to assure that it was free from errors and in the correct form for final typing. Because of Helen's revisions the material is not always in the same order as the discussions on tape, but the tapes and the original and edited transcripts will be available at The Bancroft Library. The video tape (the thirty-minute interview on the Eisenhower candidacy and political subjects of the later 1940s) is available at the University Television Office, University of California, Berkeley.

The interviews were recorded as interest in Helen Douglas led many to our office. Even during final typing, an NBC producer called to request research use of the transcript for a television drama based on her life. Editors for the Doubleday book, A Full Life, relied on the oral history for filling in and checking facts prior to the 1982 publication. Her biographer, Ingrid Scobie, with Helen's permission, used the oral history as a basic document in her research.

In May, 1973, we reached the topic of the Nixon campaign of 1950 just after President Nixon had accepted responsibility--but not blame--for the Watergate scandal, fired John W. Dean, and accepted resignations from H. R. Haldeman and John D. Erlichman. For over twenty years Helen had held to her position that she should not speak publicly about Nixon or the 1950 campaign (although once the Democrats did extract a mild, one-page statement from her). Now that impeachment proceedings seemed likely, she felt that any comments from her on her old opponent's campaign tactics would be not only redundant but unsporting, smacking of hitting a man after he was down, as it were. However, in considering the historical connections between Nixon the senatorial candidate in 1950 and Nixon of the White House in 1973, she agreed to tape a section on his campaign as she saw it, perhaps to be placed under seal.

Coincidentally her longtime friend Frank Mankiewicz appeared at her door within days, a political biography of Nixon in mind and a publisher's contract in hand. (This became Perfectly Clear, Nixon from Whittier to Watergate. New York: Quandrangle, 1973.) Helen gave Frank permission to read the transcript of the interview. With a sizeable section on Nixon and his California "proving ground," the book was in the bookstores by December--and on the desks of at least one Judiciary Committee member. (One member told me he had read it over the Christmas holidays.)

Throughout the Watergate episode Helen was plagued by reporters and television networks requesting statements. Nor did their demands for her reaction to specific events end when Nixon left office. One summer a reporter called her to the telephone in Vermont wanting her reaction as a possible quote to use in case the ex-president, then seriously ill with phlebitis, did not make it. I heard Helen refuse to give any such statement, saying it was a macabre request, and hang up. "In 1950, when I lost the election, I thought Richard Nixon was out of my life permanently," she said, "but instead it has been like having him for a Siamese twin."

The juxtaposition is tempting and compelling for most journalists sitting down to write about this woman. But the larger truth of her life lies in her own positive accomplishments, in the way she moved through her historical moments, in her faith that her gender was no excuse for defeats, and in her sensitivity to and caring for a vast circle of friends (as exemplified by the ones selected, with her help, for the larger oral history series), and for the always-complex life of wife, mother, and careerist--one whose many facets she stayed connected to with varying degrees of success, but one that she managed to integrate into her own being better than most.

Amelia R. Fry
Interviewer-Editor

June 14, 1982
Washington, D.C.

I BACKGROUND AND CHILDHOOD

Forebears: A Tradition of Land *

Fry: Well, if you have the genealogy, we don't need to go through that. We can just start with your mother and father.

Douglas: It's a long story.

Fry: We want to start, then, with who your father and mother were and what sort of family you had.

Douglas: All right. My father's family came from Ohio. Well, they came to New York State first, and I think Pennsylvania, and then Ohio. But, let's just pick them up in Ohio.

[After the interview, Helen Gahagan Douglas wrote the following history of her family, which is inserted in the transcription.]

My great-great-grandfather, William Gahagan I, of Scotch-Irish descent, was first known as a native of Pennsylvania. He was born in 1773 and died in 1845. When nineteen years old, he enlisted to fight the Indians of the North West. He came down the Ohio River to join General Wayne's Army and was made a dispatch bearer. He came down the river with fourteen other men and their families and with them settled Dayton, Ohio. He married Nancy Hamer, who was the daughter of the first Methodist minister of that early settlement. William Gahagan helped his future father-in-law, Reverend William Hamer, build the first Methodist church.

William and Nancy Hamer Gahagan had three sons. They were all born in Dayton, Ohio. Shortly after the birth of their third son, William Hamer II, they moved further into Ohio, where they were granted land by President Madison, which was known as the Gahagan

*List of interview dates on page 324.

Douglas: Prairie. Today, downtown Troy, Ohio (which they helped settle) is part of the original Gahagan Prairie. It was given to Troy by the Gahagans to build a Methodist church and to provide grounds for a cemetery.

There is an amusing story that goes along with this gift of land. There was a provision in the gift of the land that if this land, donated for the church and cemetery, was used for any other purpose, it was to be immediately reclaimed by the Gahagan heirs. Well, some time thirty or forty years ago, the cemetery was moved in order to build a school. My father's sister, Mary Clyde, was all for reclaiming the lands. (She loved to travel and there was never enough money to satisfy this hunger.) Mary's husband, George Clyde, was horrified! That abruptly ended the matter--to the disappointment of Aunt Mary.

I can still go back to Troy and see Gahagan footprints. The old homestead still stands. It was lived in by the Gahagans until somewhere around 1900, when Grandmother sold it and moved from the farm into the city of Troy.

Fry: Is the main street called Gahagan?

Douglas: No, they don't have a street called Gahagan, but there are people in Troy today who remember the Gahagans and the early days. My cousin Martha Allen, the daughter of my father's sister Bess, lives in Troy. There are also second cousins living in and around New Carlisle.

The Gahagans were part of the early history of Ohio. They were all Republicans, civic-minded Republicans. On my grandmother's side, her forebears fought in the Revolutionary War. Both my mother's and father's families fought in the Civil War. Before the Civil War, my grandmother's father, David Smith, and his sons, ran the "underground" into Troy. So my interest in the rights and needs of black people is not new to our family--it goes back a long way.

Fry: Was it in this Gahagan Prairie where they ran the underground for escaping slaves?

Douglas: Yes, I suppose so; though I am not sure.

Grandmother was very interested in the genealogy of her family and her husband's family. The last years of her life were given over to tracing family lines.* Grandmother Hamer's [Hannah Smith Gahagan] husband died when he was only forty-two years old as the result of a very serious Civil War injury. She continued to live on the farm, in the homestead, and brought up her two daughters,

*See Appendix.

Douglas: Bess and Mary, and a son--my father, Walter Hamer Gahagan II. She saw to it that they were all well educated. She mortgaged the Gahagan Prairie farm to send my father to MIT in Boston. Grandmother had attended college herself--her father sent her to Antioch College. Education, books, were important necessities.

As a child, I was sent back a number of times to visit Grandmother. Father wanted me to imbibe early Ohio history, I guess, and also to know what it was like to live in a reasonably-sized town. Father distrusted city life; he thought the city was not a proper place to rear children. So I would go back and visit Grandmother.

She would take me to the New Carlisle farm where her family had lived for over a hundred years. Her father was David Johnson Smith; her mother was Sally Cory. It seemed to me that there were a lot of Smiths in that beautiful old house; I think there were four grandsons who were running the farm. I will never forget the first breakfast. Grandmother woke me at six o'clock. At seven the family and guests gathered--the cousin farmers had been up since four or five o'clock. The repast was designed for hardy men--hot cereal, hot rolls, ham and eggs, steak, pancakes. For me it was a shocking experience--I could not bear to see so much food so early in the morning. I think the visits to both Wisconsin and Ohio have helped me to understand rural America as it was.

Grandmother came to live with us in Brooklyn a few years before she died at the age of eighty-two. When my family realized that I was serious about becoming an actress, there was shocked resistance. Grandmother received the news quietly. We were alone having a quiet visit. I was trying to make her understand why I wanted to work in the theater. I remember she looked at me and, almost whispering, said, "Well, you can teach in the theater, too, as well as in another profession, I think." [laughter] That's the way Hannah Smith Gahagan reconciled the fact that her granddaughter was to be an actress. Perhaps I came by love of the theater and my need to act from my great-grandfather, William Hamer Gahagan. I wanted to be an actress from the time I was five years old.

Fry: What happened at five years old?

Douglas: I don't know, except that I was always acting, always making up stories and acting them out.

Our home was filled with music. Mother had a beautiful voice, and she was forever inviting people who were musicians to the house. When I was very young--I don't think I was more than ten years old--Mother began taking me to the opera. She went regularly once a

Douglas: week. I had to go with her. I would be so unhappy sitting through long operas and I'd complain, "They're all so fat, Mother." And Mother would say, "Well, you won't look at them after awhile, you'll just listen to them. Now sit still." [laughter]

When I would say I wanted to be an actress, Mother would ask, "Why do you want to be an actress? Why don't you want to be something really worthwhile--a singer?" [laughter] Mother finally had her wish. I became a singer, but then Adolph Hitler and World War II interrupted my singing career--abruptly.

Mother's mother had a remarkable voice, too. She, as did my mother, sang in the church service whenever the itinerant minister visited Lodi, Wisconsin.

Fry: What was your mother's name?

Douglas: Lillian Rose Mussen. Her father was James Mussen. My mother's mother was a Griffith. Her first name was Tamer. My mother's family lived in Lodi, Wisconsin. They were farmers; my mother's father also owned the hotel in Lodi. The Mussens were early settlers in Wisconsin. Mother's father served in the Civil War. My grandfather Mussen was serving in the war when my grandmother Tamer was carrying one of his children. When it came time for delivery, there was no man on the farm. She crawled to the next farm for help and was brought back in a buckboard. That child was delivered by the neighbor.

We visited Mother's family very often. We were there at the death of her father. I don't think I was more than six or seven. There was a beautiful rainbow the afternoon of the burial. It made me very happy--I was sure my grandfather went straight to heaven on that colored ladder!

Father first saw Mother in Lodi. She was singing in the church service which he attended. Father was in that part of the country in charge of building his first bridge. Father never tired of hearing Mother sing.

Around 1913, Father informed Mother--kind of an ultimatum-- "I don't want the children any more to spend their summers on trips and in hotels. It's no way to bring up children. I want you, Lillian, to buy a place in the country where the children can go for all their vacations." The entire family had been in Europe, gone to the Great Lakes, and now were to stay put in one place, in the country, in our own house for all vacations. And that's how we happened to come to Vermont.

Fry: Oh, your beautiful compound on the lake.

Douglas: Yes, we went to Vermont in 1913--Lake Morey, Fairlee, Vermont. At first Mother rented a place on the lake, but there were so many of us the house was far too small. Something larger and more permanent had to be found.

At that time, there was a little paddle boat that went around the lake three times a day. One day Mother took a ride on it and noticed a large old house sitting on top of a knoll at the head of the lake. Shortly after, she inquired of an agent in the town of Fairlee if that particular house were for sale. She was informed it was not. "Well," replied Mother, "when it is, let me know."

The following winter, word was sent to Mother that the house was indeed for sale. Whereupon Mother bought it. [laughter] Sight unseen. Cliff Mull became ours. Living in Vermont has been important to the family--it was an important change. The Vermont countryside has influenced all of us. One can feel close to the land there. A sense of the earth helps build one's sense of security.

We were a big family. There were five of us--first the twins William Corthel and Frederick Mussen; then I--Helen Mary--came two years later, and my sister Lillian Rose two years after me; eight years later Mother had another child, a boy, Walter Hamer Gahagan III. Walter Hamer Gahagan III later became the head of the Gahagan clan.

We were a family of some means. We were educated in private schools. Mother and Father were active supporters of community needs. They were especially concerned with the quality of schools. Mother and Father both had religious backgrounds; Mother took us all to church every Sunday. Father stayed at home--he couldn't bear to listen to the sermons. He had heard so many when he lived with his mother! He saw to it, as did Mother, that we children not only went to Sunday School but listened to the grownup sermons as well.

Fry: What church was this?

Douglas: Episcopalian. Grandmother Gahagan, of course, was a Methodist. Mother was Episcopalian.

[End of insert.]

The Gahagan Engineering Corporation

Douglas: After Father graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he went to Wisconsin. In 1897, when he was not much more than thirty years old--he was born in February 1864--he built the foundations of the Williamsburg Bridge. He was a civil contracting engineer. The first bridge Father built was over the Mississippi River.

Fry: He was in charge of it?

Douglas: He was in charge of it. Smallpox broke out, and no one would come to help the sick. Italians were used for that kind of work; it was the period of the great immigration of the Italians into the country. Father couldn't get any help for the sick workers until the Catholic nuns came to nurse the victims of smallpox. He never forgot it, never. Anytime after that when Catholic nuns came to him and wanted help, he gave to them, until the last day of his life.

Father's whole history, the record of his life, is interesting. He drummed into our heads from the time we were little children, "Your word is your bond. If your word isn't good, you're not worth anything. Your word is your bond."

When Father died--I'm digressing, but this story about him suggests the atmosphere in which we were reared--I was playing in Tonight or Never. I remember that Father came to the matinee. At home, three hours later, his heart stopped. After the performance that night, John Finnerty, a friend, hearing of Father's death, came to express his sympathy. John Finnerty was a distinguished lawyer, and a prominent member of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Knowing how I would be feeling, he said he'd come to tell a story about Father that I probably didn't know. John had served on the board of a bank from which Father borrowed money to build a new dredge which was to be sent to Peru to dredge the harbor near Lima. Father, greatly annoyed with the insurance broker, sent the new dredge out to sea uninsured, and it sank just outside the narrows in a severe storm. All this I knew, but I didn't know what Finnerty had come to tell me.

After the barge sank, the board of directors of the bank, which had loaned Father a large sum without collateral or even an I.O.U. note, met. In those days, one's reputation for honesty was an accepted bond. Nevertheless, because of the size of the loan--if my memory serves me correctly, one and a half million dollars--the directors were concerned.

Douglas: A clerk brought them Father's card; he was asking to meet with them. He said, "Gentlemen, I thought I would gather with you this morning. Here is my I.O.U., the sum I borrowed from the bank. I will repay it on the agreed date." The Finnerty story was so like Father. It was consoling to learn it.

Fry: Did this have any effect on the family finances?

Douglas: No, not directly. It depressed Father, because he said, "It just means you children will get less." You know, it was the only time I ever saw him really upset. He felt he'd been stupid. It was inexcusable and stupid. And his temper, of course, was responsible for it. He was so angry at the fact this insurance arrangement had been made in a way that was not proper--so much so that he'd let the new dredge go to sea uninsured.

Well, that was the kind of father that we had, and the atmosphere that we were brought up in.

Father was opposed to my going into the theater, strongly opposed to it.

Fry: I want to take you back to his building the bridge over the Mississippi. Where was that, do you know?

Douglas: It was the first bridge Father built, shortly after graduating from MIT. He was employed in general engineering work for two years with the firm of Morris and Corthel in St. Louis, Missouri, after which he became principal assistant engineer on the construction of the Merchants (Eads) Bridge at St. Louis. Shortly after the first foundation had been erected, a severe storm wrecked it. For Father that was an experience he never forgot. Forever after in his whole career, nothing was ever secure enough. Nothing was ever safe enough. Every caution had to be taken to meet all possible conditions. No risks were permitted. No short cuts.

Fry: So he learned that very early then.

Douglas: Very early, yes. He built bridges, but that was not the major part of his work. He built railroads. Before he died, his company began to do some dredging. My brothers, after Father's death, dredged in many parts of the world. To mention a few projects that were constructed by Frederick (who is dead now) Idelwild (now Kennedy) Airport, James Beach, in New York, and the extension of LaGuardia. Under the presidency of Walter Hamer Gahagan, we built the foundation for the moon shot.

Fry: It's interesting to tie these things in--

Douglas: Yes, Father had a distinguished career, as did my brothers afterwards. At a very young age I visited work in operation.

Fry: Somewhere I read that when you were young you used to go out with him on his construction projects. Is that true?

Douglas: When Father was digging the beginning of the New Jersey-New York City tunnel under the Hudson River, I visited with him the work his company was doing on the New Jersey shore, after a man was lost while digging at the bottom of a ladder deep in the earth. Suddenly the earth had opened up and swallowed him. Father stopped all work for weeks. Efforts were made to recover the body, but it wasn't found. The day I went with Father, he decided that it was useless to continue the probing. I remember his distress, and my going down the ladder halfway when no one was looking.

Father built the New Jersey cutoff for the Lehigh Valley Railroad. It was a big contract. The work took five years to complete, at a cost of \$5,223,106. Meanwhile, Father bought a farm where he and the Lehigh engineers could stay while inspecting the work. He stocked the farm with chickens, ducks, guinea hens, rabbits, and turkeys, and then wouldn't allow them to be killed. A Japanese chef, Kasi, was in charge of the kitchen, and a housekeeper ran the house. We would stay there a couple of weeks at a time.

We saw how two mountains were joined by filling dirt between them. At the time I was a small child and very thrilled to ride in the engine carrying the dirt which was dumped to make the fill.

We'd hear how contracts were bid. It provided a background for me. One of the things that later shocked me was the way contracts are bid today for the military. In Father's operations, contracts were bid, and the lowest bidder got the contract. They weren't negotiated contracts, as so many are today.

Also, on my way to Congress, the first term, I went through the Tennessee Valley and stopped with the Lilienthals, to see some dams that I hadn't seen before.

So, this was part of my upbringing, to hear about engineering projects and what could be done for engineering. As a matter of fact, the first money that came to California was given to a cousin of my father's, one of the Corys, by my father, for an experiment to see if some of the land in the Imperial Valley couldn't be desalted. That wasn't a project that Father was involved in. He just gave his cousin the money to go to California. Father thought it was an interesting project if it could be worked out. Harry Cory was his name, and he lived out here in California for quite awhile.

Douglas: We grew up in a Brooklyn house filled with books, we traveled, there was good conversation at the table. The church was a large part of our environment.

Fry: In what way?

Douglas: Well, Mother was very prominent in St. John's Episcopal Church. For instance, I remember I said I didn't want to go to the church kindergarten.

And she said, "Why?"

And I said, "Because it's so uncomfortable." So she came to see why it was uncomfortable, and she saw that my feet didn't touch the floor. She came home to Father, and she said, "No wonder the children don't want to go to St. John's kindergarten. How can they sit there in chairs built for grownups? They have to have children's chairs." And so, Father bought children's chairs and children's tables and children's equipment to make us feel comfortable and listen to the stories of the Bible.

All church festivals we went to, to raise money for the church --in other words, church was a part of my background.

Father had his own business when quite a young man. I think this is important. He was an engineer and his company had the family name. His sister's husband, George Clyde, was in the business too; he had his own business later on, Clyde Lighters, on the East Coast. They were boats, shipping boats.

So, it was a family-owned company. The boys were brought up knowing they would go into the family-owned company, and that became a corporation later on.

In later years, my sister, after she was divorced, became the insurance broker for the company. That was after Father died. Those were the days of the Depression, you know. She went to school again and became a very expert insurance broker. Lillian was brilliant. She had her own company, and also carried all the Gahagan insurance. The twins--my two oldest brothers--ran the company. After I was defeated in the Senate race, my brother Walter asked me to join the board of the Gahagan Corporation, which I did in the late fifties. So we all had a hand in it, ultimately.

[The following is an insert written after the interview by Helen Gahagan Douglas.]

Douglas: As I've said, Mother and Father had five children, three boys and two girls. I had three brothers: the twins, and the youngest in the family--a brother born twelve years after the twins, named Walter Hamer Gahagan after Father. Walter decided when he was in high school he didn't want to be an engineer. "One father's enough, I don't want three." So after graduating from Princeton, Walter studied law at Columbia University. After graduating he went into a law firm and then entered the United States Attorney's Office.

When Father died the twins headed the company. They were also in charge of all family affairs, looking out for Mother, my younger sister Lillian and me. We worked together as a family. The twins, William and Frederick, thought of the well-being of all of us. When Frederick died of leukemia, Walter took over.

In the early part of the war, Frederick was in charge of supervising the building of boats in Panama. In our ignorance we wondered if he contracted something in Panama, but actually he died of cancer. Cancer runs through our family. Doctors didn't know at that time whether it was inherited or not. Frederick left four children, two boys and two girls, and a wife, Alice Gerli.

Her parents, the Joseph Gerlis, loved Frederick as though he were their own son. When he and Alice were married they had wanted Frederick to enter into their business; they were silk importers. But Frederick didn't accept his father-in-law's invitation to join the Gerli Company because he was an engineer and loved the work.

During the war Walter served as a major on the General Staff of the Eastern Defense Command in the Civil Affairs Division of the United States Army.

He went with Colonel Durham who was directed by General Grunert, Commanding General of the Eastern and Southern Defense Commands, to evaluate and report on the risk of danger to those commands from sabotage or espionage which might possibly be committed by Nisei--American citizens who were about to be released from the encampments where they'd been confined at the outbreak of the war. The question to be evaluated was whether or not those released should be coded and placed into IBM records and whether or not other restraints should be imposed on their movements within these commands.

Colonel Durham and Walter recommended that the Nisei were not to be restricted or coded. They showed no threat or risk to the command. Care was taken to write the report in such a way that it would explain why they were put in the camps in the first place. Colonel Durham received the Legion of Merit for the report and my brother Walter a commendation.

Douglas: William married and lived in Summerville, South Carolina, with his southern wife. His work with the company was confined to inspecting jobs in the field. Walter became the managing director of the Gahagan Company.

When I was in Congress he called me one day to ask if I'd arrange for an appointment for him in Washington. I've forgotten now what it was about except that it had something to do with work we [the Gahagan Company] were undertaking for the government.

I told Walter, "I can't make the call." He wanted to know why, and I said, "It's not proper for me to call any office in Washington that has anything to do with work my family is doing for the government."

[End of insert]

There was no law forbidding me to call an office and make an appointment for my brother, but instinctively I knew I shouldn't do it. I just don't understand how a member of Congress wouldn't know that just picking up the phone and making an appointment for someone, if he or she had any standing whatsoever, would subliminally influence the government official at the other end of the wire.

Fry: This was in the context of the dollar-a-year man controversy, too.

Douglas: Another part of my early childhood is a memory of large lunches and dinners on feast days and other occasions.

Fry: Were these family only?

Douglas: Family, but there would be guests, too. They were always large gatherings. Mother and Father, five children, Aunt Mary and Uncle George Clyde, who lived next door to us, and their son Walter, so that made ten to start with. When Grandmother came to live with us, the family table was eleven before there would be guests.

And now, another part of my childhood, which is a little different from some people's: In the summertime in Vermont, from 1913 on--I was thirteen--we always had tutors. Always. It was piano or voice, usually in this area that we had tutors. Or reading poetry and learning to read it properly.

Another part of our upbringing was during the time that Father was building a cutoff for the Lackawanna Railroad and Father had taken that large farm near the work that I told you about. Mother and all five of us went to visit there several times, and during the summer Mother had taken a house in the country not far from the work. Let me tell you something that happened on the farm which is funny.

Douglas: Father maintained that the Japanese cook he had at the farm made perfect omelets and perfect scrambled eggs every morning. He just didn't understand why they couldn't be that way at home. There was a housekeeper at the farm who was in charge of everything. Mother didn't like her very much. We arrived one night late, and she kept us waiting [laughter] until she came downstairs. I remember Mother said, "Good Heavens! No wonder she kept us waiting." She had a dress on with a high collar, I remember, with buttons all the way up the back. Mother said, "Who do you suppose did up all those buttons before she came downstairs?" [laughter]

Mother was tiny, Mother ran the house, Mother did everything. She was gentle, quiet, but went her own way and ran everything. Father was very tall, very broad-shouldered, very impressive. Mother was beautiful. Father was handsome, but he was dominant, you know. When he carried on a conversation, he was in charge of the conversation. There was a lot of talk in our house.

Larry said once, you know, "How are you able to so easily talk before people?" I said, "Because I learned at our own table. If you stopped to stutter or to hunt for a word, you couldn't get a word in edgewise for another week." [laughter]

So anyway, Mother, who had this quiet little way, didn't say a word about the eggs in our household and why they weren't as perfect as Father thought they were at his farm for the engineers. She went into the kitchen and looked around a little bit and talked --I remember the cook's name was Kasi, and he made the most wonderful kisses. (Kisses are those sweet dessert cakes, you know, that are so crumbly that when you bite into it, it all collapses.)

Fry: Yes, meringue.

Douglas: And so, that night--or maybe Father wasn't even there but came the next day--she said to him, "Walter, we can have eggs just as good as Kasi makes them." And he said, "Well, why don't we?" "Well," she said, "it just means that we have a garbage pail full of eggs that weren't quite perfect." [laughter] "That's all, we just have to keep throwing away the eggs until we get them just exactly the way we want them."

Fry: That's how he did it? [laughing]

Douglas: That's the way he did it. And they had on this farm animals--all kinds of animals because Father thought it was a lovely idea to have chickens and turkeys and rabbits, I think that was about it. And then he wouldn't allow any of them to be killed. He said, "Go and buy it [the meat]. I can't bear to kill them." He'd see them running around out there--"I can't bear to see them killed."

Fry: Let me pick up something before your phone call comes: you were kind of giving me the rundown of who was in charge of the family at a certain time, and I didn't get who had the nervous breakdown.

Douglas: The twin William. And then he was all right afterwards and went back in the business and worked.

The boys had been brought up, when they were in their teens, in the summer working in the field, so that they were acquainted with all of the work of the company undertakings. Just as teenage boys, the way boys go and find work in the summer, only they were brought into their own family company, treated not like sons at all. They just went out on the work, lived the way everybody else lived, and worked. So that they had experience. When Father died, they were not only engineers working in the office. The twins had both graduated from Williams College. They went to Williams College when they were sixteen, and they graduated when they were twenty. And then they went to engineering school at Columbia University.

My other brother, the youngest brother, went to Princeton, graduated, and went to law school at Columbia. Now, between his graduation from Princeton and law school, Father died. And then came the big Depression, which hit everybody. We were not in the position that millions of people were in in this country, but still, it was not the same.

Fry: For you?

Douglas: Yes, because there was Father's death and the readjustment of the whole company.

Father, as I told you yesterday, had a reputation and lived in a period which doesn't exist anymore, where people's word was the contract between them. That was why he couldn't understand why I made a legal contract with anybody in the theater. He understood it, but it was against his background: you had friendships, and they were deep and true, and people trusted you, and you trusted them, and that's all there was to it. If you said you'd do a thing, you did it, no matter what it cost you when the time for payment came.

Now, Father had a partner, Alfred Liebmann, almost from the time he came out of engineering school. And Alfred Liebmann owned Rhien-gold Brewery; he had nothing to do with engineering, but they were partners in the sense of his interest in the company financially. They were very close friends all through Father's life. He trusted Father on everything; there was never anything he would question.

Douglas: But when Father died, the twins were a different matter. So there was a change in the relationship there. There was a change in the relationship between the bonding companies and the company, because--the way Father worked and the way men worked at that time was that if you had a big contract you were undertaking, you went to a bonding house and you borrowed so much money, paid interest, and so forth. There wasn't the kind of capital some companies have today, where they have--well, no sense getting into all that; it gets too complicated. But anyway, that's what they did.

The bonding house, with Father, just knew that if he said his plans were solid, that they were. It was a good arrangement because Father was so careful. But they didn't realize the great extent to which my brothers had participated in bidding jobs, in the inner office, and the work, and the relationship of my brothers with my father. It had been close, and they also knew how to bid, they had been trained by Father. People didn't know it. So it was a different arrangement, after Father died. So, it was more difficult for the boys.

And more and more of the work, from that time on, went into dredging. For instance, the Idlewild Airport was dredged after that. Jones Beach was dredged while Father was alive. Jones Beach is a very large area. The Newark Airport this last time--well, if you want some of those jobs, I can give you a list if it's important at all to do so.

But in any case, the boys were head of the company then. Then William had a nervous breakdown and then his twin Frederick, died--

Fry: Oh, in that order.

[Insert written later by Helen Gahagan Douglas follows]

Douglas: In that order, and then the youngest brother, Walter, who was a lawyer with a distinguished career of his own already, headed the company. And he was just fantastic, absolutely fantastic: He kept in the company with him the engineers who had been with Father, who started with him right at the beginning, plus new ones that the company brought in. Father had an office building down on the Heights in Brooklyn. (Anybody knowing about Brooklyn would know where that is on Remson Street.) Walter eventually sold the office building there and moved to Wall Street, where the company was for a while.

Then Walter moved the Wall Street main office to Tampa, Florida when most of the work the Gahagan Company was doing was in the field of dredging. Almost all the engineers moved to Tampa to live.

Douglas: Very few stayed in the East because transportation into New York City was becoming so difficult for men who lived with their families outside the city. And then the Wall Street office was so foreign to everything that the dredge captains knew or came in contact with in their work. My brother and his wife also went to Tampa to live.

Before that, they'd lived in Caracas, Venezuela, for ten years while the Gahagan Company was dredging the Orinoco River.

Walter had a study made for the Orinoco Mining Company to determine whether it would be cheaper to transport ore where it was being mined to points of distribution by boat or by rail. The study proved that it would be cheaper by boat. It would be cheaper to dredge the river where needed rather than build a railroad to the jungle. Walter and his family lived in Caracas, Venezuela, for about ten years. Before leaving, the company also dredged the harbor to deepen it.

Under Walter's stewardship the Gahagan Company became a corporation. But we were still family owned. No Gahagan received a salary except those working for the company. None of us received an inheritance until the company was sold in 1969.

William, one of my brother Frederick's two sons, studied to become an engineer at Stanford University in California. When he graduated he came into the Gahagan Company. When the company was sold he inherited what would have gone to Frederick had he lived. (When Frederick died, he owed the company money.) We did not have to share the inheritance with his son, but we felt it was only right to do so. This was decided at a family conference between Walter, Lillian and me.

The pattern of family councils still holds. In those last years there was never anything of real importance that happened when my brother Walter didn't consult with my sister Lillian and me. Walter had the same respect for women that Father had. They both thought women should be educated. Father hadn't wanted daughters; he thought it was too difficult to bring them up. He'd only wanted sons. When Mother had two girl babies, he didn't want a home cluttered up with dumb females who couldn't take part in anything.

He had no patience with stupid women. They cluttered up life and relationships. So we had to be educated. My brother Walter also had a tremendous respect for women, much more so than the twins. He respected Lillian and me and trusted our judgement in family matters. It was at my urging that he first started thinking of selling the corporation.

Douglas: The corporation--the family-owned company was so much a part of the background of our family that the thought of selling it was painful to everyone, including the engineers who'd been with our family company for years and years. I maintained that the company should be sold. "Look," I said, "the work killed Father; let's say it killed Frederick. It certainly for a short period undermined the health of William. Are you the next one, Walter?"

By the time the company was sold we were dredging all over the world. Walter was always on a plane going somewhere. I insisted, "It's impossible, Walter, with your great big frame--it's ridiculous for you to be living most of your life in planes: For God's sake, you've got so much talent, you've been so successful in everything you've undertaken, you've given so much to the company and to all of us. Sell the company, get out, sell it, sell it!" I worked on Walter so long that finally it happened. He did sell the company. He sold it to two big dredging companies. Before doing so, he made sure that William (his nephew) and the engineers who weren't retiring all had jobs.

[End of insert.]

Mother and the Art of Living

Fry: Your mother contributed a musical background and what else?

Douglas: Well, when we moved from number 231 Lincoln Place up to Prospect Park West, that was a move that was Mother's decision. She decided she wanted to get out of the house at Lincoln Place and she wanted the house facing the Park. And Father was opposed to it. He said he wasn't going to move. His bedroom on Lincoln Place had a roof garden off of it and Father liked that. There was a big bedroom on the second floor that my sister and I lived in when we were little, and then there was Mother's bedroom. The boys always lived on the next floor.

And so Mother said, "That's all right, Walter, we'll all move and you can stay here." [laughter] So, he stayed in bed late the morning the movers were taking things out of Lincoln Place over to the one facing the park.

Of course, Father finally came along and was very happy once there. [laughter] But he didn't want to move; he didn't like the idea of moving.

Fry: I can see that you really didn't have much practice in compromise in your family.

Douglas: It was Father who kept his children all together. My sister Lillian married first. Father bought her a house just two blocks away from ours. Then my brother Frederick married Alice Gerli and Father bought them a house right on the same block as our house. They'd come in to say goodnight to Father very often.

Fry: Oh, really.

Douglas: Yes, when we all lived at home we always said goodnight to Father, long after Mother had gone to sleep. Frederick and Lillian would come in and say goodnight often, even after they were married.

Fry: That's really a marvelous thing to think about, these days when families are so dispersed.

Douglas: That's right. And we're still close. In Vermont now we have a Gahagan compound. I'm in Mother's old house. It has about five acres around it. What was the boat house Father had turned into another house; my brother Walter kept that. And my sister, who died, left what was the garage, the pool room, and another garage, and gave that to her son. He's a sculptor and a painter, Herbert Walker, a very fine one. He turned her place into the most enchanting home. And the lake's all around. Now, back of the lake property, my brother bought a place halfway up the mountain, a really proper modern house. Of course, I call our house a "cake house," but I love it. I like it better than the big houses we built in California. My brother's property has 350 acres, and that's back of the house with all the outhouses and the other things. But there we all are.

Now, the other brother, William, who has a plantation outside of Charleston in Summerville, South Carolina, has no children. I bought his share of the lake property. Fifty percent was left to Mother and the rest was divided equally between the children. I bought his share of the house and I have Mother's old house. I always think of it as Mother's house, although it was Father's money that bought it; but it was Mother who decided, you know; she decided what she was going to have and what she had to have, and she ran the household. And that understanding was achieved very early in Mother's life.

When she was first married she said something to Father about a maid or some problem with the house. And he looked at her and he said, "Lillian, you are head of this house. I am working outside. I don't want to hear about anything in the house, ever."

Douglas: And so Mother said until the day she died, "You know, the house just runs itself." And I swear to goodness, she really did run it as if it ran itself.

We would sit down, twelve to dinner, night after night with no preparation apparently, because we'd bring in guests and sit down, and there was never, on her part, "How can you do this?" or "Why do you do this to me?" There was never anything about what you did or why you did it, not to Father and not to us.

And I had to learn the hard way after I was married [laughter] that it's quite a problem to do anything! Just to do anything! Because she'd accomplished this so extraordinarily well. And that was why, again, she built her woman's power, why she could have her say, because there was no question about her ability. Father said, "Well, the house runs itself," and Mother would say, "Yes, that's right, the house runs itself." [laughter]

Fry: Well, you told me yesterday that your mother taught you the "art of living."

Douglas: Yes. For instance, if you wrote a letter, you never wrote anything unhappy in the letter, because by the time the letter arrived to the person to whom you had sent it, probably things would have changed, in which case they couldn't do anything anyway. So you didn't mention it unless there was something specifically you wanted to ask—"Will you do something? Can you do something?" But just to relate how you had a bad day or you had a headache or you had an accident--never. For instance, when I had a cancer operation, I didn't phone close friends to tell them the sad news. People phoned me from California, people who've been very close, saying, "Why didn't you let me know?"

I said, "Why would you have wanted me to sit down and say to everybody, 'Poor me, I went to the hospital.' What could you do? How could you change it?" Well, that was one thing; you didn't report unhappiness.

You didn't say ugly things about people. She was always saying that to me: "All right, Helen, in a campaign, don't say anything nasty about anybody. Don't ever say anything nasty about anybody." You didn't make a drama over nonessentials. You know, she quietly went around and did what she had to do.

For instance, to such a degree that when she wanted something--you know, in those days, you had just so much [money] to run the house on. We weren't the richest people in the world, but there were servants, and there was a car. We children had, even as young

Douglas: teenagers, one of the first Fords [which] we turned over regularly once a week [laughter]--in Vermont, not in the city; we weren't allowed to have it in the city, but in Vermont. Mother had a Pierce-Arrow.

When she wanted to do something in the house, she'd just go ahead and order the things--she was not extravagant, overly extravagant--then she'd be overdrawn at the bank. It was just that simple. And Father was on the board of directors [laughter], and he'd say, "Lillian, is it not possible for you to manage your checking account?"

"Oh," she'd say, "I'm so sorry, Walter. I'm just so sorry." But she did it.

She'd always say to me, "Helen, don't argue. If it's right for you (she always believed that), if something is right for you, it will happen. You don't have to fight for it. If it's right for you, it will happen." Well, she was gentle, and she was loving.

I think old people are so beautiful, if they've been able to live their lives in such a way that they've flowered, just as a flower is so beautiful just before all its petals drop. And Mother had friends, to the day she died, who sought her out. She was never alone, nobody left her alone. Not the children.

She never demanded anything of us. When I went to California, we were busy, Melvyn and I were working, and very often I wouldn't write or even phone Mother. Letters came from Mother regularly, but never anything, "Why haven't you written me? Why haven't you phoned me? Never anything, ever. She did what she was supposed to do, as a mother. And that was that. And if you worked and you did what was right, that was all that was asked of you. Everything would come right--it couldn't be wrong.

And you didn't go about talking about how you didn't like people. I suppose that has a lot to do with my reaction to some people and certainly to Richard Nixon. To dislike people was to put them in control of your mind. Which is what happens. You see what happens to people's faces--contorted with rage, you know. You're a slave of emotions that don't allow you to function fully and naturally, normally.

Fry: You're reacting to this other person.

Douglas: Right. And Mother was loved until the day she died--really truly loved, really truly loved.

Fry: When did your mother die?

Douglas: Mother died in the fifties, about '55.

Fry: Oh, that recently?

Douglas: She died when she was ninety-three years old, with her own teeth and her beautiful hair, and eyes that had cataracts. She went South every winter in the last years of her life, after Father died.

Father died in '30, I think it was, just before Christmas. Sister was divorced after Father died. There was no question of divorce while Father was alive.

Fry: Oh, it was impossible, I should think.

Douglas: And shortly after Father died, my sister went to see Mother. She said, "Mother, I'm either going to get a divorce, or I'm going to commit suicide." And Mother looked at her and said, "Lillian, you know our lawyer's name. Why don't you go and see him this afternoon?" She didn't ask Lillian why she wanted a divorce, what it was all about. She heard with her inner ear that Lillian's need to have a divorce was very serious; it was not capricious. Mother knew Lillian's desire to have a divorce wasn't based on some [outside] relationship she or her husband had. Her marriage just wasn't working.

And so Lillian went to live with Mother, with her two boys, in the house in Brooklyn. Then Lillian wanted to live in New York, and so Mother, Lillian, and the children moved from the house in Brooklyn to an apartment in New York City and then they moved from there to Park Avenue and 54th Street, where Mother lived for almost twenty-five years, until that apartment house was sold--it was right across the street from Lever Brothers. She didn't want to move. It distressed Mother; it was the only time she showed her age.

So we moved Mother and her companion to a hotel apartment until we found an apartment for her on the East River and my sister and my brother, who was back from Caracas, and his wife, took an apartment on the same shaft a number of floors above Mother, so she wouldn't be alone. Mother was in her apartment with her companion. And my sister had by this time married a second time and had been divorced a second time. And so she lived with my brother and his wife in a much bigger apartment than Mother's.

We were all great for having dinner parties. And so one evening they had a dinner party--the family and a few close friends--and Mother came up to join us. The dinner, as usual, was late. I don't think we sat down to dinner until half past eight. And so after dinner (it must have been eleven o'clock when we got up from table), we sat inside for a few minutes, and then Mother rose and

Douglas: said, "I think I will go downstairs." My brother, Walter, said, "Mother, now don't be a poor sport. Don't leave us." And she said, "I really think I will go, Walter." That was Friday night Mother went downstairs to her apartment.

The next day was Saturday, and Walter and Gay were going to Princeton to the football game with some other people. Mother that night--Saturday night--had a heart attack. She was taken to the hospital. And she was in the hospital--oh, I guess, six weeks, eight weeks--and my sister and I went and nursed her at Lenox Hill which was very crowded. First of all, we couldn't get her in a private room; it was really awful. The nurses were terrible, and we stayed with her night after night. And then finally it was obvious after she had one or two slight strokes that we should bring her back home.

When we had first moved Mother into her new apartment on the East River, my sister Lillian and our sister-in-law Gay had moved Mother's own furniture into the apartment. Her clothes were put away as they had been on Park Avenue, in drawers. The apartment was filled with flowers. When she walked into it, it was as if she had lived there always.

When Mother was brought in on the stretcher from the hospital (with nurses, or course, around the clock) I said, "Mother, you're home! Look how beautiful the sun is outside." And she said in a very quiet, gentle voice as always, "I never did like it." [laughter]

Fry: [laughing] So much for your propagandizing.

Douglas: So then she went to the big bed, and she was nursed, and she lived about four weeks. So, she was well almost up until she died. During that time my brother William and his wife Betina came from South Carolina.

We were all in New York, Lillian, Walter, and Gay. Lillian had her own insurance company. She worked for the Gahagan Company as their insurance broker. Walter was at the office working every day. They were in and out of Mother's apartment every evening but I was there every day and toward the end even in the evenings up till midnight.

One evening we were all sitting in Mother's living room when the night nurse came in and said, "Come now, it's time." We went in and stood around Mother's bed. She would come to every now and then you know, smile and say something, and then be in almost a coma. So when her eyes were fluttering, I sang to her, as she died, one of the Hebridean songs that was written for someone dying--a

Douglas: beautiful song. I sang very softly. Mother loved music so. Mother smiled, opened her eyes and then they fluttered a little bit, and she was dead, with all of us standing around. So it was beautiful.

I never could understand how some people feel when a person dies; they feel, "I have to go away." I don't feel that. I have to be close to the person who dies. And so then they all left, and they said, "Come Helen, now you must go."

And I said, "No, I have no intention of leaving."

"Well, what do you think you're going to do?"

"I'm going to stay here all night."

"You're going to stay all night?"

I said, "Well, of course. I won't see Mother again." So her companion was there, of course, and I stayed there. And it was so peaceful, you know. And there was nothing sad about it, because she'd lived a beautiful life, and full life, and had died with all the people who loved her around her. But it was just--I relived the whole thing.

I tell you that because I think it indicates the relationship between Mother and me. We were very close. Mother loved all of us children equally but differently, of course. One day she said, "Poor Lillian, she doesn't seem to understand." I don't know what Mother meant.

Fry: You also had a grandmother who sang, herself, when she was dying, I think.

Douglas. Mother's mother. She died when Mother was a child, five years old, of pneumonia. Mother had pneumonia at the same time as her mother.

My mother would call, childlike, for water every hour. To keep her quiet so as not to disturb her mother who was so very ill, they gave Mother all the water she wanted. Which was apparently good for her. But her mother (my grandmother) who was burning up with fever, wasn't given a drop of water. Those caring for Mother thought water would be bad for her and they were trying desperately to save her.

Mother inherited her mother's beautiful Welsh voice. Whenever an itinerant minister came to Lodi to preach in their little church, Grandmother Mussen sang during the service. Father fell in love with Mother when he first heard her sing, in the same church.

Fry: Was it the practice of the day not to give water to someone ill with pneumonia?

Douglas: Whatever the reason was, they didn't believe in it.

As I remember the story, Grandmother Mussen died on a Sunday. Grandfather was upstairs with her, the children were all downstairs --it was a large family--eating lunch. When they heard their mother singing "Nearer My God to Thee" from beginning to end, they thought she'd recoverd and was going to live. When Grandfather came downstairs, they jumped up from the table thinking Mother was better. He was very solemn. "No," Grandfather said, "your mother's dead."

It was curious you know for Grandmother to love singing so much that just before she died she sat up in bed and sang a hymn from beginning to end. I suppose something of her story and my mother's caused me to study singing.

Music has and had a place in our lives. Mother had a remarkable voice. It was naturally placed. My own voice coach, Mme. Cehanovska, told me Mother's was one of the most beautiful voices she ever heard. But Mother never sang professionally.

After Mother and Father were married, they came to New York to where Father was in charge of building the New York side of the piers for the Williamsburg Bridge. Not wanting to be idle, Mother looked for and found a reputable, highly respected operatic coach. She went to his studio and asked if he'd listen to her sing and tell her what he thought of her voice. Mother waited for three hours until he had time to hear her. When he did, he was so excited he told her he would give her lessons for nothing if she'd work with him every day. He'd prepare her for opera. When she was a singer, she could repay him. Mother said, "I'll have to ask my husband," and the coach said, "Bring him to me. Let me talk to him."

Mother asked Father if he would go with her to talk to the coach. Very much against Father's judgment, according to Mother, he consented. The coach told Father that his wife had a remarkable voice. If she was a quick study, she could be singing in opera in a very short time because her voice was naturally placed. It was just something that should happen. "Opera shouldn't lose a voice as fine as your wife's." Father thanked him, took Mother's hand and left the studio.

Outside he said, "Now, Lillian, either you give up this notion of opera or you go back to Wisconsin." Mother gave up the notion of opera.

Douglas: But she didn't give up singing. She loved it too much. But she never sang professionally. Instead, she had five children. Having a large family was not a hardship for Mother. She looked forward to it. As a matter of fact, she wanted to have six children. She enjoyed being the head of a big family. But she never gave up her music.

Fry: And it became a very rich heritage in the family.

Douglas: Right, right. Never gave up her music.

Fry: You said once your other grandmother was really very austere.

Douglas: Grandmother Hannah, my father's mother, believed in the education of women. Great-grandfather Smith, her father, sent her to Antioch College, which scandalized the family. They made such a fuss, thinking he was ruining his daughter by educating her, that Great-grandfather took her out of college before she graduated. But Grandmother Hannah's education helped her to manage the farm and everything to do with it when her husband died shortly after the Civil War.

I don't think Grandmother's daughters, Aunt Mary and Aunt Bess went to college; they married too early. But when it was time for Father to go on to higher education, Grandmother Hannah mortgaged the farm so that he could go to Massachusetts Technology and become a civil contracting engineer. The president of the bank begged Grandmother not to mortgage her farm: "What future do you have if your son fails, or doesn't repay this loan?" And Grandmother replied, "I have no future if my son fails."

Father didn't propose to her until his mother met her and approved of the marriage. (Father met her when he was in Lodi, Wisconsin, stopping at Grandfather Mussen's small hotel which he'd accepted in repayment of a bad debt.) Father was building a railroad from Chicago to Wisconsin. Mother never got over the fact that Father couldn't propose until his mother came to Lodi and inspected her.

Fry: Well, she must have passed muster.

Douglas: I was sent to visit this grandmother by my father when I was very young, to see how people really lived, because he didn't consider, as I told you, that living in the city was living. He wanted me to see how people lived, where they had roots, where they could trace their history, where one knew the folks, where there were deep friendships that held the community together, and developed a sense of responsibility for the development of the community, and the well being of everybody in it.

Douglas: When Grandmother Hannah fell off a ladder and broke her leg, Father and his sister, Aunt Mary, insisted that Grandmother come to New York and live with them. I think it was a mistake. Grandmother was a queen in Troy, Ohio. She had a rich life there. It fitted her living and her age.

When she came to us, she lived our life rather than her own. Fortunately it was only for a few years. An example of what I mean: One day she came across the porch to our house. (The two houses were joined by a porch. When you looked at the building from the street, it looked as if it was one house.) Well, as I say, Grandmother lived with Aunt Mary and Uncle George and their son, Walter. This particular afternoon she came to us, the twins were as usual roughhousing. Lillian was part of it.

And so Grandmother came in with her cane and her high white collar, a net collar, with the stays in it. She wore a black silk dress that went over it--perfectly groomed. (Her own daughter never saw her undressed until the last days of her life.) And so, she came in, and pretty soon she walked out; I felt that she was upset that they hadn't stopped roughhousing when she came to see us. When Grandmother went back across the porch to Aunt Mary's house, I followed her up to her room and we fell to talking. She said something about Frederick, one of the twins. She was always taking his part with Father and Mother. And I said, "Grandmother, you're always taking Frederick's part or that of one of the other children. I never hear you taking my part, and you know, I really love you very deeply. I think I love you more than the others." Because I had visited Grandmother, I really was closer to her than the other children.

And I'll never forget: she looked at me rather severely--she wasn't the kind of grandmother that grabbed you and said, "Darling child!"--she looked at me and said, with deep warmth, but not an all-embracing kind of affection for a child--because she treated me as a grownup. So, she looked at me and said, "Helen, you don't need my help. You will never need anyone's help." And no explanation. It puzzled me, you know. I thought, "What does she mean?" I suppose then I must have been fourteen years old, something like that.

I remember then, I think, another confidence she gave me. She was very religious--not so that it was neurotic in any way, but she was religious. Mother was, too; they went to church every Sunday. It was part of their life, really a functioning, vital part of their life. Grandmother read her Bible, and wrote in it the genealogy of the family.

And on this day, she was sitting at her desk working, and I came in and sat beside her in the room and didn't speak until Grandmother was ready to talk to me. Then we began to discuss a few things, and

Douglas: suddenly, she looked off in the distance and said, "If I had to do it again, I would do it all quite differently." I didn't dare ask her what she would do differently, but I thought about that.

And right now--I hadn't thought about it in comparing what I have done in my life until this second, but if I had to relive my life over again, I would not do it quite differently. I think I would do it exactly as I have lived it. Now, what Grandmother meant, I don't know. She was a young, beautiful woman when her husband died. Could she have married again--did she mean that? Or did she only mean that she wouldn't have come to New York? I don't know.

But, "I would have done it all differently"--the world "all" is important. She was very prominent in the Daughters of the American Revolution, she was very prominent in the Civil War picture. She was--the only word I can say is dignified and reserved. And because of that, for children, a little austere.

I remember when I visited her once, we went out to the farm which had been her mother and father's farm, which went for many hundreds of acres, and had a great stream running down. They had many children, and now it's all broken up and sold. That was at New Carlisle, Ohio.

I told you that they got up at five o'clock in the morning, the Smith boys when they still ran the farm as a business, and that there was a huge breakfast at seven o'clock, which to me was absolutely sick-making with all this food on the table. You know, there was everything, it was like a dinner! And I followed one of these young men (he was quite young) out into the barn that evening. I remember he grabbed hold of me and kissed me, and I remember I was so frightened that I ran in the house and my grandmother, looking at me, saw that I was frightened, and later on that evening she said, "You know, I don't think we'll stay the rest of the week. I think I'm taking Helen back tomorrow." Well, that's not important except that--

Fry: She was sensitive.

Douglas: Don't you think we ought to get to other matters? We're spending all our time on the family. [laughter]

Fry: That's good, because this material is not available anywhere else.

Girlhood: Home and School in Brooklyn

Fry: In your elementary school, can you give me some idea of what it was like and if you liked your classes?

Douglas: I did not like school.

Fry: [laughing] From kindergarten on?

Douglas: Oh, maybe in kindergarten.

But first I suppose I should start with a description of the school: it was a private school; it was on the same block as our home. The reason Mother bought our home was so that her two little girls, going down the street, wouldn't have to cross the street. And around the corner was the small private school my brothers went to. There were five of us.

Fry: Oh, one was for girls and one was for boys?

Douglas: Two different schools. The girls' school was Berkeley Institute, and it has a very fine reputation. We lived on the Park Slope in Brooklyn.

The Park Slope at that time was, along with the Heights, a perfectly beautiful area to live in. When we were children, Mayor Gainer, who was mayor part of the time, lived right around the corner from us. His back yard faced our big gardens. The area was always highly policed. There was never any danger. It was one of those quiet areas with enormous houses, and old homes. It was really a very beautiful part of the city. There were no apartment houses, all private homes.

Fry: With spacious grounds?

Douglas: Well, there weren't so many grounds. Our block was unique. Ours were earlier houses--I suppose 1880 or 1890--and they had that look--all I can say is they looked like a fancy cake. [laughter] And around the house in the lot that was very large for each house, there was enough space to have gardens. So there were gardens to the right and to the left of the house and in front of the house. Now there are apartment houses there. And down at the end of the block was Berkeley Institute where Lilli and I went to school. The school also had a tennis court. On that block there were not more than four or five houses--on the whole block, you see.

They set this way, facing Lincoln Place between Eight and Ninth Avenues. On Ninth Avenue, the houses were like those on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. There would be gardens maybe in the back, but not between them.

Fry: Oh. And their walls joined?

Douglas: No, not walls, but there were houses one right next to the other. This particular street of Lincoln Place was different, not across the street, just on our side of the street.

The school itself was spacious--the rooms were large. The teachers were very good. I had a very good German teacher. I think that's why German became my second modern language. My German teacher would say, "Helen, you just sit and do your work," and I'd stay after class and do my work.

Then I had this other teacher, Miss Grimbball, Elizabeth Grimbball, a southerner, never married--a lady, very gentle. And she really sustained my [laughing] drive toward the theater. She was the drama teacher. I made my first speech when I was five years old on the platform of the school, and I forgot my lines.

Fry: [laughing] That was an auspicious beginning.

Douglas: That's right. But right from the beginning I was speaking. I was president of my class. I was always president of my class. Can never remember a time at Berkeley when I wasn't president of my class.

Berkeley Institute was geared so that there were many activities. For instance, debating was an important course in the development of the students. I was learning a lot, even though I wasn't working at my books the way I should have been. Of course, I debated; I was always on the debating team. And girls would try to get me on their side, whether I was interested in their issue or not. The one issue that I was passionate about was the independence of Ireland. [Fry laughs] Absolutely passionate about it. Well, that was school--

Fry: Excuse me, but did you have a lot of other Irish there who were on your side?

Douglas: No, no, no.

Now, I never was a very good speller; I'm not today. And so I was in a class that was very curiously arranged. The class I was in, that I entered in kindergarten and would have gone on in through school, was made up of the daughters of the wealthiest families in Brooklyn. They owned [laughing] a good part of Brooklyn, as it were. I was dropped back a class because of my spelling. The students in that class were the daughters of small shopkeepers, whereas the class above were the people that owned the great big stores; ran the banks --you know, the president of banks, and so forth. They lived in great big homes on Eighth Avenue, enormous homes, with staffs of servants, and so forth.

Douglas: I remember one girl came to school--she didn't live on the Park Slope--but she came in a little wagon, looked like one of these doll wagons, and the horse was a small pony [laughing] and the pony wagon brought her to the door of our school. I was always envious of that wagon. I wanted to have a wagon like it.

Well, anyway, I suppose certain behavior patterns began to show up at this point, because dropping back into this class, I never tried to be with the girls in the other class. I stayed with this class.

Fry: You preferred them socially you mean?

Douglas: No, just that that was where I was, and those were the children I was with. So, for me it was the same.

There was in our class a cripple. (I suppose she had polio.) She wore braces. And one day at gymnasium, the girls in the upper class were in the gymnasium with us. They were coming out and we were going in the next hour in the gymnasium. And for some reason, one of the girls began to pick on the crippled girl in our class.

Fry: You mean verbally?

Douglas: Verbally, and physically. She was teasing her, outrageously so it seemed to me. And I remember the girl who was the leader in this; I went up to her, and I grabbed a hold of her, and I threw her on the floor and I sat on her, and I said, "How dare you do this!" And of course, we were both sent to the principal. It was really funny. I remember saying, "I'll do it again! How dare she attack someone who is not able to defend herself!" I must have been very young, no more than eight years old, something like that.

School was always boring to me. It was also boring to walk down the same side of the street, so unbeknownst to Mother, I would cross over the street sometimes and then come back, across the street. And of course, I was always making up stories and always acting, all the time. And I would make up these stories, and act and act and act.

And one morning, I remember (Mother was still asleep) and we children had our breakfast early. And I went into her bathroom, and I put powder all over my face, because I was playing a pale heroine [laughing]. And I went to school, and the teacher said to me, "Helen, did you cook breakfast this morning?" And I looked at her wide-eyed and said, "No." "You didn't cook breakfast this morning?" I said [whispering], "No." "Why, that's interesting. I thought you'd fallen into a flour barrel." [laughter]

Douglas: [laughing] When I was born--this has no relevance whatsoever to somebody whom you're interviewing who went to Congress finally--but when I was born, Father was building the reservoir at Boonton for New Jersey. Mother had taken a house in Boonton, New Jersey, for the summer. There were the twins, and I was about to be born that fall. Mother had planned to go back to New York, where Mother and Father lived at that time, to have the baby.

I started to say I was impatient, but that's not really the way to say it, is it. [laughter] But Father wasn't there the day she began to have labor pains; and Mother went to the station and it was late, so she came back to the house, and a midwife brought me into the world. I've thought that one of the reasons my handwriting hasn't been of better quality was that I was yanked out, or however I came out--I wasn't brought out very properly.

So, I really was born in Boonton, New Jersey, and I used to say when people would say, "Boonton, where's Boonton?"--"Well, that's where it is--Boonton, New Jersey." And people in New Jersey have often said, "Well, you belong to us. You were born in Boonton," but I know I didn't stay there very long. [laughter]

There was something I wanted to say to you about the school--I stayed in school, I think, probably through my second year high school, when at the end of that year I failed everything. Everything. They didn't pass me. That was a great trauma for Father. But I don't think I gave you really the impression of our childhood, the surroundings of our childhood--

Fry: No, you didn't.

Douglas: We lived in a house with big rooms, which makes a difference. There was spreading-out room.

Fry: For everybody.

Douglas: Yes. And there was music, there were books, there were flowers, there was travel, there was church, there were the church festivities, there was always the family council after church around the big dining room table. There were always the pilgrimages to the country, always the feeling that children had to spend as much time as possible in the country. There was travel--travel in this country and travel abroad. And we'd always go en masse when we traveled.

Fry: The whole family?

Douglas: The whole family. Everybody--except Father. Father came and joined us (for instance) when we went to Europe, with nurse and my mother and my aunt and uncle, and all the five children. The boys

Douglas: went down the Rhine with a tutor, and Mary and the baby and I stayed in Baden-Baden. Father's partner had a car over there, and I was allowed to tour with Mother and my aunt and uncle, because I was the oldest girl. You know, ours was just a big family always together, a family that throughout all of our lives, if any one of us needed anything, he or she could go to someone in the family. There's always someone that will listen and help. And whoever's the head of the family is responsible in a sense.

I think there is something I should tell you about our family: none of us does something the same hour the same way. We were all activists, and we were all, I guess, loud-spoken, and we all liked to talk a lot, as I told you, and each of us had our own thing going all the time. Father would have his breakfast when he got up. He came home when he was through working.

We didn't have an orderly house in the sense of a father arriving every night at five o'clock and having dinner at seven, properly served. Not at all. We would have dinner always at the same time with Mother, and Father would come when he came. And it might be five o'clock, it might be six, it might be seven, it might be eight; it might be nine or ten if he was working. And he would finish working when he was ready to finish work, and that was that. And then of course, our delight was always to hang around Father's chair while he was eating, and eat again.

Father never put his light out at night. He always read. He was an inveterate reader, and his own room was piled with books. And he'd go to sleep with his book on his chest. And we would--we were all night owls, all of us, except Mother. Mother would just go and close her door and pray that we all wouldn't make too much noise. So, we'd go to Father's room, and then we'd go downstairs, the long flight of stairs to the first floor and down the hall to the kitchen, and we'd make onion sandwiches, or we'd have fruit, or we'd have cheese and crackers, or milk and crackers with Father. And of course, he was always ready to do that, always ready to do that.

[pause] Anyway, that's a picture of Father. Father was tremendously anxious about the children, that we'd get into trouble, we would hurt ourselves or something. And Mother was never nervous. I remember he came home once and we were sliding down the banister. Now, as I told you--you know how you remember houses when you were a child sometimes; they're not as big as what you remember--but I remember now these stairs went on forever up.

Mother found the house. They'd lived two blocks from there, and when the fourth child was born, she said, "We can't live here anymore, it's too small." So she found this house right next to

Douglas: the school and so forth and she said, "That's where we have to be." And so Father took one of his very close friends, also an engineer, to the house to see what he thought (Mother's name was Lillian) whether Lillian was right about the house. So this man said, "Well, of course, if you want to kill your wife, you buy that house. Can you imagine her going up and down those stairs with a baby in her arms, or three babies one at a time? She's going to take them up and down those stairs?"

So Father repeated that to Mother and said, "You can't live in that house because you just won't be able to handle those stairs."

Mother said, "Who's handling the stairs? I'm glad to have had that advice, but I tell you this is the house I want, and this is the house I can live in, and this is the house I'm going to live in, and maybe other people wouldn't be happy here running up and down the stairs, but it will be very good exercise."

Father was always afraid we would fall down the stairs. There was a banister that ran the length of the stairs from the first to the second floor and curved at the top. One after the other we were sliding down it when Father came home early one evening. We were all little tots. When he saw what was happening, he stood in the hall, frozen with fright and called out loudly, "Lillian, Lillian!"

Mother came to the head of the stairs and said very calmly, "Yes, Walter?"

"Lillian, do you know what the children are doing? They're sliding down the banister.

"I know, Walter."

"You know?"

"Yes, Walter, I taught them to slide down." [laughter]

"You taught them!"

"Of course. The banister is irresistible. I had to teach them so that they wouldn't fall off and kill themselves. It's all right, Walter." [laughter]

And then another thing: he was so strict about our upbringing, the girls. He was always afraid we'd get into trouble, that we'd come home with a baby in our stomach or something terrible. Oh, so strict in our upbringing. After I'd been a star in the theater, and then left that and singing, I'd been with my singing teacher in the winter.

Douglas: That was while I was still in the theater, and now the theater was finished, and she was going to Europe and I decided to go to Europe with her. It was the first summer I was with her.

So, why the family agreed I don't know, but it meant that Mother went with me, and it meant that the youngest boy went with us, Walter. And on the way back home in the boat, a cable came from Father saying that Lillian, my sister, who was two years younger than I, was going to be married, that he had agreed to her engagement to someone we all knew and liked.

Mother was beside herself! She said, "Father has lost his mind!" (I tell you, it was Life With Father. You just read Life With Father, the play, and you have our family, the way it was.) "Your father is out of his mind, he's just out of his mind to let Lillian marry at the age of nineteen! It's just madness!"

For some reason, Lillian had wheedled Father into saying that she could get married. She was determined she was going to get married, and she was married. She was married at the age of nineteen.

It was a very difficult time at first for me--I had a tremendous sense of loneliness when she left. We were very close. I was two years older than she. We had our own little apartment on the third floor. We had our bedroom and our sitting room and our guest room and our bath, and the boys were down the hall from us with their bedroom and their bath and their sitting room. And now I was alone, and it was hard.

Father's Opposition to a Theatrical Career

Douglas: Do you want to ask any more questions about this?

Fry: Well, I was about to go into some questions on what happened with your schooling.

Douglas: Berkeley Institute was a private school, and since I spent all of my time on dramatics in the school, this particular year I failed everything.

Fry: What level was this? Was that high school?

Douglas: I suppose it was about my second or third year of high school. I just didn't study. All my allowance money I would spend going to the theater--the nearest theater in Brooklyn. I would sit in the gallery and watch a play [laughter], perfectly happy.

Fry: Did you have a group of friends who were theater nuts?

Douglas: I'd just go by myself to the theater, just go by myself.

So, when my report card came in that year, and Father saw it, he was in shock. We were all inveterate readers. He was so distressed, and he said, "Because you read a lot of books, you think you know something. You don't know anything. Just because something's written, it isn't necessarily true." This was part of my upbringing too--"Just because it's written, it doesn't mean it's necessarily true." You have to do research, you have to find out what is true.

And so we went to Vermont after that, and I'll never forget-- I had these long lectures. You know, Father was a great talker. And I remember that lecture started early in the morning, at 9:00 a.m. Father took the train that night to New York; the chauffeur took him down to the next town to the Staten downriver; about ten o'clock. Now, except when we stopped to eat very quickly, that conversation took place all day, all afternoon, all evening. And he said, "You know, you're ignorant. One can support women if they're educated. One can't support women if they're not educated."

He was very advanced. He'd say, "What do you want to be?-- Just a breeding machine? You have to be educated, you have to be educated. Just because you can talk a lot, and read a lot, you think you are educated, but you're not. Young lady, make up your mind to it. You're going to college; if it takes you until you're forty years old!"

Then Father left. Mother had gone to her bed sometime before [laughing] so as not to listen to the whole subject. I remember as I went to bed, Mother said to me, "Helen." I said, "Yes, Mother." "How do you like upsetting the family all the time? How do you like being the one to upset the family?"

I didn't sleep that night, and the next morning, I got up very, very early, and went out and climbed my favorite mountain. There was a story which Mother would tell. Part of her family were Welsh, with all the stories that the Welsh have--the Welsh lore and all. Because, both sides of Grandmother's family were all Anglo-Saxon.

Mother had an uncle who had, in his later years, developed very painful rheumatism or arthritis. (I don't think people talked about arthritis then. Must have been rheumatism.) He was very religious, as they all were. So he shut himself in his room and began to talk to God. He said, "I'm not going to come out until you tell me what

Douglas: to do." And so finally he maintained that God talked to him and told him, "If you just take water and bread or milk and bread," or whatever the story was, if he'd just take that, he'd be all right. According to mother's tale, that's what her uncle did, with the result that he was relieved of pain.

So, I had heard this story as a child. So I thought, "Well--" I was brought up very religiously--I thought, "If I go to the top of the mountain, maybe God will talk to me." So, I climbed and climbed, and all I did was cry--because first of all, I couldn't get to the top of the mountain, and this seemed very important. There was no top of the mountain. There were always trees; there was always something beyond. There was no top. I was so exhausted by crying, but there was no way to talk to God, I thought, unless I got to the top.

I'm a student of Emily Dickinson. She said in one of her poems, "Finally there was nothing to do except to pray." So, I too had to go up on high, to pray, although I might do nothing but stand there as she had in awe. It must have been late in the afternoon. So I thought, "Well, I'll go back down." I was utterly exhausted. What was I going to do? It didn't seem right that I should want so badly to act and my father should be so opposed to it, because part of our conversation the day before was to the effect that I was not going in the theater, that "nice young ladies didn't go into the theater."

So I started back, and I was tired and stumbling, and I was not properly dressed really, to walk. I remember I had on a blouse and a pleated wool plaid skirt the way girls wore them, very long, down to the ankles--and pumps, slippered pumps. I was not watching where I was going. I came to a cliff overlooking a valley, still up in the mountains. From there I had to walk down to the lake.

I suddenly found I'd come down a path that was so slippery I couldn't go back up. And the cliff was right here, to the left of me, and a narrow rock ledge to the right. And the narrow path of about two feet that I was coming down. And I'd slipped down just enough so that I could not get back up. So there I sat, and I think for the first time, I learned to look at myself. And I always say one must have a sense of humor, you know, to be able to really look at oneself.

And I thought, "Well, I have been so self-centered, since the day I was born, thinking about what I wanted, and what I wanted was to act." I hadn't done what my mother and father expected me to do, which was, study. I saw myself for the first time as rather ridiculous. "It can't be right for anybody to want the theater as much as I wanted it, and not have it." How can anybody want to

Douglas: be something that much and have it wrong for them? "So, I'm sure, maybe, if I do what Mother and Father think is right, maybe things will change." And so suddenly it was as though a great weight were lifted off my spirit. I took off my shoes and threw them down onto the next ledge, which dropped suddenly, about five feet. I wriggled out of my skirt and slid down. Somehow or other, I made the ledge of the cliff without falling off into the valley below.

When I returned home I was very calm. Mother acted as if nothing had happened, that everything was all right, although I'd been away all day long. I didn't say anything to Mother that evening but the next morning I suggested that we go to Hanover, the home of Dartmouth College. When Mother wanted to know why, I told her, "Well, they have a summer school there. Maybe they'll take me." Mother thought it was a good idea so we drove to Hanover. It's down the river from us about twenty-five miles. They'd never taken a girl in the summer school there. But, I persuaded them to take me.

You know the Hanover summer school was a preparatory school for Dartmouth; it wasn't a college summer school. It was a preparatory school for those students who wanted to attend Dartmouth but weren't quite ready to do so. They could take needed extra courses or re-study courses to get better grades. It was that kind of school.

The second day in Hanover, I heard about a boarding school in Northampton where Smith College is. Mother and I drove to Northampton to visit the Capen School for Girls. It was run by two sisters, old maids and superb educators. They didn't think anyone knew how to prepare girls properly for college as well as they did. I think they were right. When they died, Capen School was incorporated as a part of Smith College.

Mother made an application for me to enter at Capen. It was at that school that I prepared for college. There were no distractions, there was no entertainment of any kind. I attended Capen School for two or three years. I took my entrance examinations for college from Capen. Father had said I had to go to college. He didn't specify any particular college. So I decided that the best arrangement I could make for myself was to go to Barnard, because it was in New York City and near the theater. And when I suggested to my father that perhaps it would be a good idea if I went to Barnard, he, being a very fair-minded man, did not object, though I rather suspect that he didn't think I could get in because you had to take sight examinations in Greek or Latin and in one modern language.

Douglas: Well, I was badly prepared in Latin, but I had the head of the Latin Department at Dartmouth coach me. In 1917, the summer I attended the school in Hanover, Harry Edwin Burton, Daniel Webster Professor of the Latin language and literature, was the only summer school teacher of Latin. His predecessor in the chair, Dr. Lord, retired in June 1916. He gave me private lessons. We would sit together as he explained, "Helen, you haven't time to become a Latin student. You will have to use what knowledge you have. You have a good vocabulary. Many of our words are derived from Latin. Therefore, you must study the Latin paragraph they give you at Barnard to see if you recognize any of the words, see what you can glean from the words you do recognize. You know now more words in Latin than you think you do." I shall forever be grateful to Professor Burton.

At Capen School for Girls there were no extracurricular activities to distract the student except gymnasium which can hardly be considered a distraction--gymnasium and our books--that was it!

My second year at Capen I did manage to organize a drama group. We produced one play, Shaw's St. Joan. Of course, I played Joan. No, there were no extracurricular activities at Capen. The Capen sisters undertook to educate the young ladies who came to them to prepare them for college and they did prepare their students for college. If you weren't good in a subject they gave you a tutor; you did nothing but study all day long. But it was very good for me; I learned to study subjects that didn't interest me. I had a very good memory; I could memorize very quickly plays or, in later years, music, very quickly. But I didn't like to read or study material that didn't really interest me, vitally interest me.

II ESTABLISHING A DRAMATIC CAREER AND BEGINNING POLITICAL WORK

To Barnard College and the Theater

Douglas: So I learned to concentrate on things that didn't vitally interest me, and it was good for me.

Fry: Was that for two years?

Douglas: That was for two years, yes.

Then I went to Barnard College. I was class of '24, and after my first year, though I was not a scholar in the sense that one should be a scholar to qualify as an honor student (a program that Barnard was initiating about that time), I was told I qualified as an honor student which meant that I could specialize in a certain course of study. Honor students weren't required to attend classes. They were expected to do their work in class and on their own. Honor students had to write two papers, one at mid-term and one final paper. The honor student was passed or flunked on the basis of his papers.

I was invited to be one of the honor students after the first year. I turned the offer down. I said, "I know exactly why you want me to do this. It's so I will study much more, and I'm only going to study enough to get by, because I'm only interested in the theater." I ran the theater at Barnard even as a freshman.

Fry: Was this all extracurricular at Barnard--the theater work?

Douglas: Yes, except that I took courses under Latham--in drama and literature and so forth. I took other courses that were interesting to me.

Fry: Were you in a program for a major study?

Douglas: No, no. Regular A.B.

Fry: General education, arts and sciences?

Douglas: Right. And it was during that time that Alis De Sola and I wrote a play called Shadow of the Moon which was produced by Miss Grimball --Elizabeth Grimball. Miss Grimball had been my teacher at Berkeley. She came from a very distinguished family in Charleston, South Carolina, the Grimballs. And she had been my teacher at Berkeley Institute, and she really was one of my greatest supporters and one of my most encouraging friends. She would say, "Just do what you're doing. It will work out all right." She trained many people who made names for themselves in the theater as directors, producers, and actors. She produced the play which I wrote with Alis De Sola.

Alis became a writer. She was also in my same class at Barnard and she, too, was invited to become an honor student. She accepted it, and graduated with honors. The first work Alis did on graduating from Barnard was to write a charming book of short stories titled The Body is Faithful. From 1941 to 1945 she worked in the Office of International Affairs. In 1949 she went to the Voice of America. And then in 1956 Alis went to the Muscular Dystrophy Association where she has been for fourteen years, first as a writer, then editor, then the editor-in-chief. Now Alis is partially retired. She continues to work, however, with the Muscular Dystrophy Association as their consulting science editor.

[Insert by Helen Gahagan Douglas.]

Well, anyway, we wrote this play. Harry Wagstaff Gribble, after seeing me in Shadow of the Moon, invited me to play the leading role in the tryout of his new play which Elizabeth Grimball was producing off Broadway in New York City. It was while I was rehearsing in Harry's play that Alis and friends locked me in the room so that I'd pass my philosophy course. Alis and some other students got me in the room and threw the key out the window and said, "Now, you've got such a good memory. We're going to review William Pepparell Montague's philosophy course and you're going to sit here all day and listen to it."

John Cromwell saw me in Harry's play and invited me to play a small part in a production of his which was to open shortly after college closed. There was no problem about rehearsing for the part which, of course, I accepted. Father didn't even make much fuss about my playing out-of-town. He thought it was just one of my usual amateur plays. Mother had gone early to Vermont that spring and Father said I could go out of town if my Aunt Mary chaperoned me, which she agreed to do.

John Cromwell was associated with William A. Brady. The play Cromwell was producing was opening at the Playhouse in Brady's New York Theater. When Cromwell's play came into town, Father still

Douglas: thought I was performing in an amateur production and that I'd return to Barnard in the fall. He didn't pay much attention to it and never went to see me in it.

[End of insert.]

Well, I played that, I guess, two weeks, and William A. Brady sent for me one morning, called over to our home in Brooklyn, and asked if I would come over and see him in New York. He wanted to talk to me about a part. Well, his daughter Alice Brady had turned down the star role in a play that he wanted to produce, decided she didn't want to do it. It was called Dreams for Sale by Owen Davis. When I went over to see him, he gave me the script and said, "Go home and look at this and come back and read it to us tomorrow." Oh yes, he had me read it first and asked, "Do you think you can play this?" and I said, "Yes, of course I can play it." So, I went home and I learned the first two acts.

Fry: Wow! In one evening?

Douglas: In one evening. And came back the next day, and I was up on the stage, and he had someone read with me--he thought I was going to have a script in my hand. And so I proceeded to play it.

Two weeks after that, we opened out of town. Again Aunt Mary chaperoned me. I had to tell Father that the Cromwell play was a professional play when it opened in New York. I couldn't hide it anymore. I also had to tell him that I was playing the leading woman's part.

Mother came down from Vermont for the opening, and Father also came to the play. I was a success. And after the play was over, Brady came up to Father and said, "What do you think about your daughter?" And Father looked at him coldly and said, "Keep her decent," and turned on his heel and walked backstage to get me.

I was called for every night at the theater by my father or my brothers, or I was picked up by the family car. The play wasn't received very warmly by the press, but I was. Those notices made me a professional actress overnight.

Years later--oh, I suppose two or three years later, when Father saw that I didn't go to theater parties all the time, and that I was content to come home every night because I was really deeply interested in the theater; that I truly loved the theater, every aspect of it--he said to me one day, "I build bridges and you build character. I see very little difference." In other words, Father recognized the fact along with the critics that I was an actress and that I was drawn to the theater in order to act, rather than to go to parties.

Fry: So while you were still acting, your father came around to approving what you were doing?

Douglas: Oh yes, yes, yes. And he loved the theater, you know; he loved the theater. And also, he just couldn't believe that his daughter was going to be an actress, but once he became reconciled to that fact, he was one of the greatest supporters and admirers of my work.

Fry: Well, the first years in the theater, I was called for by my brothers or the car came, or Father would come by and pick me up. I came home every night and rarely went out anywhere after the theater. When I would go on the road, Mother went with me very often, which was very hard on the family, you know.

When I left the theater to prepare for opera, I lived with my teacher, Sophia Cehanovska. She lived with her son in a brownstone in New York City on East 62nd. Street. And that was a great--

Fry: Concession?

Douglas: --period of discussion. But after Father met her, he approved heartily. She and her son occupied the whole first floor in a large brownstone. The front room was her studio and the back rooms were the bedrooms, and then there was the kitchen and dinette. It was one of those big old brownstones in the sixties, on the West side in New York City. The third floor was available. I rented the front rooms, a sitting room with a little tiny bedroom next to it and a dressing room with a sink and a bath tub.

In any case, I lived there, and I asked my family, "Please don't phone me. And don't come to see me, except when I call you." Because I was really working from seven o'clock in the morning until about ten o'clock every night. I'd have my lesson every day at about ten o'clock or eleven o'clock--I think it was eleven. And it would last an hour and a half, or two hours. Not singing all the time. A lot of the time Madame sat at the piano playing as if it were the orchestra, and I would sit beside her and in the treble play my part.

Fry: Oh, to help you get it--

Douglas: It was just to get it--more than get it in my head, I had the feeling of what was happening, and the nuances, all of it.

It was voice placement and coaching that Madame Cehanovska gave me in that period. And I worked. I didn't ever need a chaperone, because I was with her, or working by myself in my apartment. That was what I was doing, and Mother knew that was what I was doing, and Father knew that was what I was doing. The only entertainment I had whatsoever was to go to the opera, which I did regularly, especially

Douglas: to hear the roles that I was studying. I'd go to those operas. I'd been brought up attending the opera with Mother, so that the Metropolitan wasn't foreign to me in any way. I was used to going there.

Then when I went to Europe to sing, I was always with my teacher, except for that short space when I left her and her daughter and went to sing in Vienna. It was there that I received a cable from my brothers telling me that Father was dying. If I wanted to see him, I'd have to come back home immediately. I came back home with my teacher.

Father didn't know he was dying of cancer. To have a valid excuse for my returning home, I cabled David Belasco accepting the role in Tonight or Never which I'd turned down before sailing for Europe. The play was patterned after the Tosca opera. I sang a number of times in it ending with the Tosca aria. Since there couldn't be an understudy I couldn't afford to catch cold. So I rented an apartment on Central Park South and moved into it with Frau Gaehler who was acting as my dresser. She'd been our governess and later Mother's housekeeper.

I couldn't have a cold. It wasn't as it would be in opera where if I was sick, some other singer could go on for me. When Sam Goldwyn made the motion picture of Tonight or Never with Gloria Swanson and Melvyn playing opposite her, a singer sang for her. This was possible in the film; it wouldn't be possible in the theater. I had to sing and act.

Fry: She didn't.

Douglas: No, she had no voice; she couldn't sing. I mean, she had a little tiny voice, but she didn't have a trained voice. There was someone that dubbed for her.

So, not catching cold, being able to rest as much time as I needed, I had to have an apartment in New York.

I'd come home every night, and Father called me every night on the phone, from Brooklyn.

Fry: How did you ever date, or did you?

Douglas: Oh, I had beaux; I had beaux all over the place. I was engaged almost from the age of eighteen on to someone to the day of thirty, when I got married. I was perpetually engaged. And in Europe, I'd fall in love each time I was there, always with someone else.

Douglas: Last night we celebrated our forty-second anniversary. I said Melvyn was the only man I could ever think of staying with. Before I met Melvyn, just the thought that I'd be with a person forever was enough to turn me against him, even when I thought I was infatuated. The idea of marriage ended one engagement after the other.

I don't mean that I didn't go out with somebody. Let me put it this way: I was never part of the theater social life. I was more often a part of the opera social life, although I was more a part of it because of Mme. Cehanovska and her son. For instance, the summer I was studying with Madame, George was singing at the Ravinia Opera in Highland Park, Illinois, just outside of Chicago. There would be parties for Elizabeth Rethberg and Gennaro Papi, who was one of the conductors at that time, and others in the Ravinia company.

After a performance, Madame and George served a lot of food and some wine, and that was it. It didn't go on all night--and it wasn't every night. There'd be a party once in awhile, but they didn't sing and carry on the way people are able to in the theater--and it very often destroys them.

So, that was the agreement that was made. It was not a stated agreement actually. It was never said, "Helen, you're to be chaperoned." Not at all. It was Father's terrible concern. It carried over from the time we were children, that something would happen to me, that a young woman couldn't be in the theater without being somebody's mistress, you know. It was one of the bones of contention between us. He said, "All my friends had mistresses in the theater." I said, "Oh, that's repulsive!" [laughing] And I would go flying out the door. I was very young, you know.

So, I knew that this upset him, and it didn't mean anything to me. I was so intense always--I was so absorbed, so satisfied by what I was doing, whether it was the theater or working on the music.

From Drama to Opera

Douglas: As long as I stayed in the theater, I had no problem about plays. Plays just came to me. I was under contract to William A. Brady, which again was something to which Father objected. We had quite a go-round that first period after the play, because Brady insisted I sign a five-year contract, and Father thought that was ridiculous. First of all, I had to go back to college, he said. Well, I was not about to go back to college if I could avoid it, and certainly not since I had gotten one foot in the door of the theater.

Douglas: And then, one day--I told you before we had music in our home, singers who were guests, and Mother sang, and I loved music. Mother had taken me with her to the Metropolitan year after year. Music was part of my being. And one day, about four years after my first professional theater performance, Giuseppe Bamboschek, one of the conductors of the Metropolitan [conductor at the Metropolitan Opera 1916-1929] called. (He'd been in our home many times.) He said, "Helen, you asked me if I knew of a good singing teacher and I told you I didn't know of a really fine teacher and coach. But the woman who was the most outstanding teacher in Russia has come here. She's a refugee, Mme. [Sophia] Cehanovska. And if she will take you, that will be an experience, because she is really a very great teacher and musician."

I had studied with another woman, who would come with us to Vermont in the summers--Mme. Sodarhuck, who lived in those apartments above the Metropolitan Opera House. I wasn't very satisfied with that, and that's how I came to speak to Bamboschek about it. I had sung for him and he said, "Yes, you have a voice. You need a good teacher, and you need a fine coach. There's no sense working with somebody else, because they'll just do you harm."

So, I went to Mme. Cehanovska, and I knew at once she was a great teacher, just as Miss Grimball had been a very great teacher for me in the theater, as Mother was a very great teacher in the area of--living.

Fry: Oh, can you expand on that?

Douglas: I'll come back to it.

I went to Mme. Cehanovska without really meaning to prepare for opera. But this great Russian teacher of opera singers just couldn't imagine one would study singing with her unless preparing for opera. So, I found myself working toward that end.

Fry: Were you acting all this time in plays regularly?

Douglas: Yes, yes. I'll send you the list. It will keep you straight about dates.

I was under contract to George Tyler. We went to Europe that summer--Mother; my brother Walter, the youngest one in our family; and Mme. Cehanovska. I studied all through that summer. At the end of the summer I was determined to continue my studies, and not do the play that George Tyler expected me to appear in that fall.

Douglas: Well, when I returned, he had already cast the play; the scenery was already made. They were simply waiting for me to come home to start the rehearsals. I went to see George Tyler. I said, "Mr. Tyler, I can't do the play." He said, "What do you mean you can't do the play? You're under contract." I said, "I know I'm under contract, and I'm begging you to let me out of the contract. I must study with Mme. Cehanovska. I must go on singing." Well, he went around and around the matter, because legally I had to go on.

Finally, he said after hours of argument, "Leave the theater to kitchen mechanics. It's pure insanity that you want to sing. Now, don't you know how long it will take you to be a singer? Don't you know you had to start this years and years ago? It's sheer madness, madness. What can I say to convince you?"

But then he finally agreed. And I said, "I'll tell you what: if you're ever in trouble, I'll come back and work for you for nothing and help you any way I can to make up for this."

Well, two things happened to help me make up for not fulfilling my contract. I went back and worked at my singing all that winter. Then, Tyler telephoned me one day and said, "You said you'd help me if I was in trouble. Well, I'm in trouble. Would you please come down to my office and see me." So I went to see Tyler. He was going to do Diplomacy with an all-star cast. But the actress he was bringing over from England to play Countess Zika at the last minute was ill and couldn't come. So he told me, "I have to have you, that's all. I have to have you in the cast." I said, "All right." I played the New York run and went on tour with Diplomacy.

When Tyler produced Macbeth, it had nothing to do with me, but it was a Tyler production. And he called me one day and he said, "Helen, can you come see me. I've lost so much money on Macbeth, and I have to have some additional money. Do you suppose your father would loan me \$5,000?" I said, "I don't know, but would \$5,000 help you?" He said, "Oh, yes it would." George Tyler was one of the great producers. So I said, "Mr. Tyler, I'll give you the \$5,000." Then I wrote a personal check from the money that I had saved when I was on tour with Diplomacy. I'd been saving it for my music. That was the money I sent to Tyler.

Father, who was on the board of directors at the bank, saw this check come through for \$5,000 to Tyler and said, "What is this all about?" I don't think actually I made it out to Tyler, because he didn't know what it was. I think it was "cash" or something or other, whatever it was.

Douglas: And I said, "Father, it's all right. I assure you that the check is all right."

But he said, "Why would you be giving somebody \$5,000?"

I said, "Father, it's all right. Just believe me that it's all right."

He believed me, and I think it was long after that that I told Father I had given Tyler the \$5,000, because I felt, you know, I just felt that I had to because of his letting me out of the contract.

So that was all, that was the end of that. Of course, then poor Tyler died. He didn't have money, and there was never any question about his paying it back anyway.

I went to Europe and sang, came back and played again; then in 1928 I left for Europe with my teacher. I had sung for Otto Kahn, who was the big backer of the Metropolitan Opera. The idea was to go and sing in Europe, and then come back again and audition at the Metropolitan. I went to Europe and sang in various areas. The first time I sang in Europe was in Czechoslovakia in a town called Moravska Ostrava, which was the steel town in Czechoslovakia. When I sang Tosca, I had been studying only two years and a half. I'd never sung with an orchestra, but I sang with the orchestra without any difficulty. It was as though I'd always sung with an orchestra. I say this not for myself but for her--Madame Cehanovska was such a fine pianist that when she accompanied me it was as though a whole orchestra was supporting me. She was a fantastic teacher and a fantastic coach and a great musician.

In the summer of 1930 I was in Vienna with Madame and her daughter, who lived in Europe. I had just sung Tosca in Vienna. The performance was in the summertime, in the park there. It was very like our opera here in the summer in Central Park. I came back to the hotel and there was a cable for me, "If you want to see Father alive, come home at once." Now I had said goodbye for two years; I was supposed to be in Europe that long. Just before I went to Europe, Belasco--David Belasco--had invited me to star in a play called Tonight or Never and I had turned him down.

I called home on the telephone, and found out that Father had cancer of the windpipe; he didn't know he had it. He had to go to the hospital because of heart pains. When he was there, they discovered he had cancer and that it was terminal. If I stayed the two years as I had planned, I'd never see him again.

Douglas: We were very close as a family. And so I cancelled everything, all the bookings arranged for me. Madame and I returned on the same boat. I cabled Belasco from the boat and asked, "Is your offer of Tonight or Never still open?" I had to have some excuse for coming home.

A few days after I came home, Father said, "I don't know why you've come home, Helen, but I'm very glad that you have."

Father didn't go out of the house until the afternoon that he came to see me in Tonight or Never. After the performance, Father came backstage to my dressing room. He said to my dresser, Frau Gaehler, the German woman who had been with us since we were children, "Take care of my daughter." And he said goodbye to her and shook hands and then embraced me, and said, "You were beautiful, Helen."

The car drove him home. He went upstairs to his room, and they brought him his dinner tray. Mother was going to the opera that night and she went upstairs to Father's room to say goodnight to Father and Father was dead. The heart just stopped. It was the best way to go. He escaped the terrible pain he would have suffered. They knew less then about drugs to relieve pain; it would have been horrible for him. He died a few days before Christmas in 1930.

Then several very important events happened in rapid succession. It was in Tonight or Never that I met Melvyn Douglas. He was my leading man. Belasco died at the end, in the spring. Melvyn and I were married—just before the end of the run in New York. Before the run was over, Melvyn was offered a picture contract by Samuel Goldwyn. And the first picture to be done was Tonight or Never, with Gloria Swanson playing my part.

Tonight or Never was about an opera singer, and that's why Belasco had wanted me, especially, to play the part of the singer. I'd asked him once why he'd wanted me especially to do the role. I knew there were a number of young singers at the Metropolitan who wanted the part. "Well," he said, "the whole play, Miss Helen, is based on the fact that the singer has never had any physical relationship with a man. You know, a number of singers wanted to play this part. But no one would believe in their inexperience." And I said, "What do you mean, are you commercializing my virtue?" [laughter]

Fry: All those years of being chaperoned by your family!

Douglas: Yes.

Marriage and the Move to California

Douglas: Melvyn accepted the Goldwyn contract. I had been offered picture contracts before we were married, and I had turned them down. We almost didn't marry because of the Goldwyn contract.

I remember saying to Melvyn, "Why do you want to leave the theater to play in pictures?" He said, "I have to support my family. I can't turn down an offer like this." And I said, "Is money going to determine what you do in the theater?" Melvyn patiently explained, "You know, Helen, money does determine work for some people." [laughter]

That's why we came to California. I worked in the theater while Melvyn was making pictures. I starred in Tonight or Never, The Cat and the Fiddle, The Merry Widow, Mary Queen of Scots, and sang with the San Francisco Opera and the San Francisco Symphony.

Before we went around the world in 1933, Melvyn asked Sam Goldwyn to release him from his five year contract, and Goldwyn agreed. Under the Goldwyn contract, Melvyn had had no choice of pictures or parts. On our trip around the world, we probably saw it for the last time it was—

Fry: Altogether.

Douglas: Yes, altogether. The trip was very illuminating in many ways. I'd been to Europe a number of times. As I said, I went there first when I was eleven with the family. A month after Melvyn and I returned from our trip around the world, I gave birth to our first child, Peter Douglas. It was in France that I discovered I was pregnant.

We sailed from Los Angeles on a cargo boat through the Panama Canal to France. After a flying trip to Italy to see Melvyn's parents and his little son, Gregory, from his first marriage, we sailed on a Dutch ship from France to Egypt where I discovered my trunk had failed to leave the French port. That's how we happened to visit Palestine, which hadn't been a scheduled stop on our itinerary. The work the Jewish settlers were doing made a profound impression on both of us. It was because of that first visit that I returned to the Middle East on study tours many times and later supported the Jews in their effort to establish a homeland in Palestine. When the Jewish Agency found we were in Palestine, they took us to see the early farm settlements among which were the kibbutzim. In Jerusalem we visited what there was of the university at that time.



Helen Cahagan and Melvyn Douglas in "Tonight or Never"
1930/1931.



Helen Cahagan Douglas with composer Joseph Marx, in
Salzburg, Austria, 1937. Singing a group of songs to
his accompaniment, Helen Cahagan Douglas toured middle
Europe in concert with Marx in 1937

Douglas: Well, when we discovered I was pregnant, the decision was whether we should keep on going or return home. We decided to keep on going.

Fry: Did you go to Germany at that time, on this trip?

Douglas: No. I'd been to Germany first as a young girl, and didn't go there on this particular trip.

We returned to New York in 1934, to play in the theater. In 1935 I returned to California to make She, my one and only motion picture. I agreed to do the film because Melvyn and I had invested our savings in Mother Lode, a play we'd commissioned our friends, Dan Totheroh and George O'Neil, to write for us. It wasn't a success. So when the picture She was offered to me, "Well, now that I had a child, I couldn't turn it down." I came out to California to make She; Melvyn remained in New York to play in Louis Bromfield's DeLuxe, opposite Violet Heming. When it closed, he joined me in California and almost immediately began filming She Married Her Boss opposite Claudette Colbert. After that film, Melvyn's career in pictures went up like a rocket. He was very popular. From then on, he worked in pictures until the war.

Concert Tour Collides With Nazis, 1937

Douglas: But when I was finished with my picture, I had no desire to appear in another film. I didn't like acting in pictures. They were not for me. I went back to Europe for four months in '37, concertizing through middle Europe, ending in Salzburg in a concert at the festival.

Dr. Kerber who headed the festival was also the impresario of the Vienna Opera. The same day I was invited to sing Tosca at the Vienna Opera the following winter, I had an interview in a Salzburg coffee house which confirmed my suspicion that the Austrians were perfectly willing to go along with Hitler if they could get a share of the new power he was promising to the Germanic people. This was so abhorrent to me that I [pause] couldn't feel the way I had felt about the artists I'd met and admired.

For instance, I was touring a good part of the time with Joseph Marx, who next to Richard Strauss was the most esteemed composer in middle Europe. I sang his songs--beautiful, beautiful music. And I thought, "This man, and the intendant of the Opera, all of them may be supporters of Hitler. They accept what he says, what he stands for. I can't be part of it." So, when I came back to this country, I cancelled my contract.

Douglas: For the second time I gave up my singing career in Europe for personal reasons and developments that touched me. I came back to the United States with the feeling I didn't really know what was going on in the world and couldn't go on living in such ignorance, spend all my time working on my own career, expressing my talents. I felt I wasn't part of my time. I think my family background and Melvyn's interest in politics played a part in the decisions I made in the following years. [tape off]

Fry: When you came back from Europe, you just mentioned to me that you joined the Anti-Nazi League--

Douglas: When I came back from Europe, the first thing I did was to cancel my contract to sing Tosca in the Vienna Opera. Melvyn couldn't meet me at the plane; he was filming a picture at R.K.O. I went to see him, first thing. As I entered the door of his dressing room I said, "I'm not going back to Vienna, I can't go back." Melvyn replied, "All right, you won't go back, but can you greet me?" [laughter]

At that time the Anti-Nazi League was starting in California. I joined it, Melvyn joined it. I remember saying when I joined the Anti-Nazi League, "I do so with the greatest sense of unhappiness. I know the Germans, I have German friends, I speak German, I have sung German music. I've admired German artists. But today the thinking of Germany is sick. Hitler will surely take Europe to war and we will be involved in it." I was absolutely convinced that it would be so, and that we must oppose the evil philosophy that Hitler was expounding.

Fry: Did Mr. Douglas join it too?*

Douglas: Yes. I suppose there's something written about the Anti-Nazi League or it's out in Oklahoma. Everything's in Oklahoma with my papers.

It was ironic. I no more than agreed to return to Europe to sing Tosca which I had wanted to do than I refused. I wanted to sing in one of the great opera houses. I had sung in smaller opera houses, but not in the great ones. I had to sing in Vienna, Berlin, New York or London, or with the San Francisco Opera Company to arrive.

*See Arthur, Thomas H., The Political Career of an Actor, Melvyn Douglas and the New Deal, Ph.D. thesis, 1973, Indiana University. On deposit in The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Douglas: It was the meeting at the coffee house that did it. The morning before I went to the Opera House to meet the intendant to sign my contract, I had a telephone call from the foremost music critic of middle Europe. He'd often lunched with Joseph Marx, the composer, my accompanist, Fritz Kuba, a Viennese musician, and me. It seemed natural for him to call me.

He asked if I would meet and talk with a friend of his at lunch. I said no, I couldn't, I was going to the opera to see Dr. Kerber, but I would come along later to the coffee house musicians frequented and meet his friend. I said, "My sister's with me. I will send her ahead of me."

When I arrived at the coffee house, my sister Lilli was sitting at a table looking rather peaked. She disliked the Germans heartily. She spoke French beautifully and she disliked the German language and German music. When I sat down, we talked for a few minutes with the critic's friend, a very handsome Englishman. He excused himself to speak to somebody who came into the coffee house and said, "Excuse me for a moment, I'll be right back."

When he left, Lilli turned to me and said, "Helen, now don't you start talking, because if you do, you will never believe what he has said to me. Let him talk--you won't believe it if I tell you. You'll think that since I so heartily dislike Germans, I'm prejudiced. You can't believe what that man's been saying."

He came back, and sat down; we talked a minute before he suddenly asked me, "Do you know what's the matter with the world?" I said, "No, do you?" Instinctively, I felt he was going to say something horrible. "Yes, I do," he said, "the Jews." He then proceeded to say everything that was later said by Goebbels, Goering, and Hitler.

He was obviously part of the British pro-German movement which later came to this country, and I suppose he thought I was a potential convert. I had had good notices every place. I sang in Germany; I had just sung with success in Munich and in the Salzburg Festival. He didn't know that before leaving the U.S., I'd asked my agent in Salzburg not to book me in Germany. He'd said, "You have to sing in Munich. You have to sing in Munich before you go to Salzburg. It's impossible for you not to go there first."

In Munich I'd sung a number of songs by modern German composers. I received very good notices. I suppose pro-Germans were hunting for converts, you know; they thought I was someone who might be sympathetic and, as I had a name in Europe and was known in the U.S., I would be in a good position to support and promote their philosophy.

Douglas: He very quickly understood that I wasn't sympathetic to what he was saying. My sister Lilli and I said goodbye to him and went outside. I felt as though I'd been hit in the solar plexus. It was that interview that made me know I couldn't return to sing Tosca in Vienna the following winter.

Suddenly it ruined everything for me. The artists in Salzburg, all charming, talented people, was this what they thought? Everything then--the little things I'd seen as I went along--took on a different meaning. For instance, when I sang in Prague, Fritz Kuba, the Austrian accompanist Hoffstötter had engaged to accompany me throughout the tour, wasn't allowed to play for me. The fear and hatred of Germans was very great. The tension was high.

In Prague, the manager of the concern said, "Miss Gahagan, you can't sing lieder in Prague. There'll be a riot in the hall. We don't trust the Germans. (It was '37.) We don't trust them at all! You don't dare sing German songs."

I asked, "Don't you see a difference between Strauss and Schumann and other such composers and the Nazis. You have to separate a Joseph Marx, who is also a statesman in the Vienna legislature from the German Nazis. You have to separate them." He just looked at me, you know, with a sorrowful expression. "One can't separate Germans. And they're all alike--the Austrians too."

I began to put together everything that had happened during my tour of middle Europe. I think if I hadn't been as emotionally strong and healthy as I was, it would have been a very deleterious experience in my life. As it was, it really was a turning point.

Fry: You mean, if you hadn't been emotionally strong, you might not have withstood it?

Douglas: Yes, yes, but it was interesting that always at the moment where there seemed a choice between doing what was right, or what I had planned to do, I had to do what was right even if it disrupted my plans. There just was no choice, never any question.

Fry: Did you have trouble breaking your contract there?

Douglas: No, I had a contract to sing Tosca at the Vienna Opera, not a contract for the season.

First Political Activities

Douglas: So, that was why I joined the Anti-Nazi League in California. It was the first political organization I joined. Melvyn was politically active in California before I was. He was one of those actors who in 1938 supported Culbert Olson in his campaign. They supported Culbert Olson and became active in his campaign because Louis B. Mayer, four years before, had arbitrarily demanded or taken out of the salaries of some Democratic actors, writers, and directors, contributions for the re-election of the Republican governor. And so they thought about it for four years, I guess, and decided come the next four years, they would actively support the Democratic candidate. Melvyn was active in that campaign; I wasn't.

At that time, farm migrants from the dust bowl were coming into the state. The great debate at first was the question whether they were in the state or not. Discussion of the migrants wasn't based on sensible questions: why were they coming into California, what should be done about them, what could be done to stop this migration flood or should it be stopped. I became involved in the welfare of the migrants and a strong, active supporter of Roosevelt Farm Security programs.

Some newspaper people and actors asked if they could have our patio to hold a meeting to try to raise some money for the migrant children in the summer of 1938. It was on a Saturday; Melvyn was at the studio. I didn't attend the meeting on our patio. I had just come home from the hospital with another child, Mary Helen. My cousin came into my room and said, "Helen, for heaven's sake, come outside and listen to what is being said. They say there are migrant children in California who have pellagra." I went into the patio and listened to a description of migrant children and was very moved by what I heard.

A few days later, a telephone call came asking Melvyn if he would meet with a few people to see if a Christmas party could be given for the migrants and their children at the Arvin Farm Security Camp. There were thousands of children in the valley. I've forgotten the exact number.

Melvyn, now concerned about the condition of the migrants, said he would attend the meeting. I went along with him. During the meeting the question arose as to how they would raise money for the party; how they could get enough food and toys for the two thousand children. There were no clothes involved, just toys and food, for the party. They didn't know how to go about it. How would they do it.

Douglas: So I spoke up and said I should think you would go to the bread people, the meat people, and the toy people and tell them you're trying to give a Christmas party for migrant children in Bakersfield, many of whom have pellagra. Their parents are working in the field producing the food we eat. They'll all give. And they said, "That's a lovely idea; why don't you do it!" [laughter]

That was the beginning of my work for the migrants. We gave that first Christmas party at the Bakersfield Farm Security Camp. It was a success. (Laurence Hewes, who was the director of the Farm Security Camps in the West Coast Region can tell you something about our Christmas parties for migrant children. He is presently at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara. We gave three big Christmas parties at Farm Security Camps. The last one was in Imperial Valley.

Fry: Were all these Christmas parties the same year or at different Christmases?

Douglas: Yes, subsequent years.

A committee had been set up to give aid to the migrants and support the unionization of migrants in the field. It was called the Steinbeck Committee. John Ernst Steinbeck approved of the use of his name and the work of the committee. After the success of that first Christmas party, members of the Steinbeck Committee asked me to be the next chairman. With some hesitation, I undertook it. And that began my opposing--without knowing I was opposing--the efforts of two or three on the committee to use the plight of the migrants in a way that would strengthen Communist efforts in the field.

Fry: In the Farm Security Administration Camps, how did what you were doing fit into the whole controversy about the Communists?

Douglas: Well, first let me describe the camps. I visited all of them. I knew what each one looked like. The camps were on federal land with protective U.S. fences around them. They had tent platforms. There were showers with hot and cold water, very important for families who had been living on the ditch banks. There were wash tubs where mothers could bring the family's dirty clothes and wash them. There were medical facilities to treat the migrants, many of whom had never been to a doctor--I should say the greater number of them.

If the migrants had anything on the skin, a rash or open sore, he or she would call it "raisins on the skin." You know, they had one or two simple answers to whatever was the matter with them.

Douglas: In addition to the living quarters and office for the camp director, there was a large central building where migrants could gather. By means of democratic methods, the migrants in each camp organized themselves so as to regulate their behavior and responsibilities.

The migrants, at that time, were all white, descendants of the early settlers of those states from which they fled. They had lived in the states from which they came as sharecroppers and tenant farmers on "one-crop" farms. They were ignorant of the most rudimentary skills. It was as though everything that had been learned from the earliest days of the settlers had washed over them. In order to prepare them for successful lives outside the camps, each camp had a program to teach the women how to make mattresses, sew, raise truck gardens and can food. The men were trained as farmers.

The men hadn't the kind of skill men had in Ohio, for instance, or Vermont, where men can do almost anything to keep their houses and farm machinery repaired. They didn't have it. The migrant family was a different kind of family and the Farm Security tried to give them the background they needed to go on to build a new life.

And of course, many of them did. Loans were provided for those men who showed themselves to be resourceful and quick learners. They then purchased their own land and under the continuing guidance and advice of Roosevelt's agricultural program, the great majority of them developed, successfully, their own farms. Those farm loans were repaid almost one hundred percent. They were one of the best investments in the New Deal. It's ironic that many of the migrants who became successful farmers also became very conservative.

Fry: Right. There's our Associated Farmers today. [laughter]

Douglas: Well, no, the Associated Farmers was formed before that--that was the great--

Fry: I meant today some of them are probably ex-migrants.

Douglas: Probably, probably. But in any case, they were shored up. This seemed to me to make sense. It made sense to help them.

I visited with migrants on the ditch banks. Covered with dust, they had to drive miles, using precious gas, to get water. I saw how mothers held their families together; protected their little girls. I saw the despair of men when separated from their work--from land--some simply collapsed. It was the mother who held the family together and withstood every hardship.

Douglas: So, what we did in the Steinbeck Committee was to build an organization throughout the state to collect food, clothes, and money for union organizers. We sent clothes into the Farm Security Camps.

Now, there were three people on the committee--with whom my first political battle took place. They insisted that the clothes must go into union halls. And I fought it. I said, "The clothes cannot go into union halls. If we send clothes into union halls for migrants who don't have clothes, whose children don't have shoes, don't have a sweater or coat when cold, migrants may join the union in order to get the coat or the shoes, and that's coercion.

I think the condition under which migrants work, the short period in which they work, the conditions under which they live while working, the lack of schooling for the children, all this has to be corrected. But the unions have to make their own argument, and it has to be an argument that farm workers accept, that makes sense to them." I wasn't going to be part of anything that has to do with coercion.

So that was the first battle, and it was my work in this way that even led back to Washington, where John L. Lewis said, "Mrs. Douglas thinks I have to turn every union man upside down to see whether or not a Communist card falls out of his pocket." And in the city of Los Angeles, Phil Connolly, who was head of the Labor Council, fought me and later didn't support me when I ran for Congress because I wouldn't allow the Steinbeck Committee to be misused under my chairmanship. I don't know if Connolly was a Communist, but his maneuverings in the fields disturbed me. I wasn't even sure the three people on the committee I opposed were Communists. I'm not sure today. But often what they wanted to do didn't make sense to me in terms of the work we were trying to do in support of the migrants. It was going in the wrong direction.

Fry: Did you work with Carey McWilliams' group in all this?

Douglas: He wasn't on the committee. But he was around and about and supported it. Yes, I discussed this issue with him. I said, "I have to oppose it, sorry. I don't want to cause a lot of trouble in the Steinbeck Committee but I'm sorry, if I'm chairman, it has to go very peacefully. We stand for unionization, period. We're in favor of it. The unions have got to do the rest."

Fry: Did the State Relief Administration (SRA) under Olson, have something to do with how much unions should help the farm workers?

Douglas: Well, you have to ask Melvyn.

Fry: There was a lot of controversy about this at that time.

Douglas: Right. Larry Hewes is here in California and you can ask him about this. He was head of Farm Security in this region at that time.

I was known throughout the state as an actress, as a singer. I had sung in San Francisco Opera. Wherever I talked about the migrants, there was always an audience. I talked nationally too about migrants; I went to Washington about the migrants. I talked with Eleanor Roosevelt about the migrants and to the president.

Melvyn and I urged Mrs. Roosevelt to visit the migrants when next she came to California. On her next trip, she and Tommy Thompson, her secretary, stayed with us. We hired a plane and took Mrs. Roosevelt and Tommy to the valley. Larry Hewes was with us on that all-day trip. We visited the camps and migrants living on ditch banks.

When I was visiting Mrs. Roosevelt in the White House just before the war, I talked to the president about the migrants, about their need, about our Christmas parties, about corrective measures that should be taken. Some have been although their living and working conditions are not what they should be, much had been accomplished.

And as a result of my work with the migrants, as I would go around the state talking, people would say, "You ought to be a national committeewoman." Well, I really didn't know very much about the national committee. I knew there was such a thing as the national committee. and I knew some of the members on it, but I didn't know what a national committeewoman was supposed to do. What were her responsibilities?

Melvyn, because of his campaign activities in support of Culbert Olson was appointed by Olson to the...

Fry: Welfare Commission?

Douglas: Yes, Welfare Commission, and he was appointed later by Governor Olson as a delegate to the 1940 convention. In order to make sure he'd go, they appointed me an alternate delegate. [tape off]

Fry: Was this your first time to be active in the Democratic party?

Douglas: Yes, it was. I didn't vote for President Roosevelt in 1932.

Fry: You voted for Hoover?

Douglas: No, no. I didn't vote for Hoover either. I couldn't vote for Hoover. It was after that campaign in the first years of the Roosevelt administration that I became a Democrat. I couldn't quite switch over in 1932...[laughter]

Fry: Yes, this must have been a tremendous decision.

Douglas: Not really. I was playing in Tonight or Never in Homer Curran's Los Angeles theater during the 1932 campaign. We were living in the San Fernando Valley. Melvyn bought a closed Pierce Arrow so I could rest going into town. It was very far, you see, to drive from the Valley to the theater. I thought it was so ugly in downtown Los Angeles, I didn't want to look at it. I'd pull the curtains, curl up on the back seat and arrive at the theater rested. I would leave the house early about half past four or five to listen to Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt over the radio I had installed in my dressing room.

Melvyn was a Democrat, although he contends he wasn't anything, really. He was born in the South--Macon, Georgia. His mother was a southerner; his father a Russian Jew, a wunderkind. His family sent him to this country when he was about nineteen years old. He concertized here. He was a composer and a pianist and later taught at various colleges. He was teaching at the college in Macon, Georgia, where he headed the music department, when Melvyn was born. Melvyn went to school part of the time in Canada, and in different other places where his father was teaching.

Fry: You had a radio in your dressing room?

Douglas: I had a radio in my dressing room, and I listened to President Hoover and Governor Roosevelt. I wasn't able to vote the Democratic ticket; I wasn't able to vote for Roosevelt. I couldn't bring myself to do that, but I couldn't vote for Hoover either. So, I really did the same as people in this last election [Nixon versus McGovern], didn't I?

But, before the year was out, I was impressed with Roosevelt's handling of the Depression and disheartened by what Republican friends were saying as to how Roosevelt organized our affairs in order to put people to work. The argument by most Republicans--certainly the Republican party--was to give them relief money. For the government to put people to work was socialism--better to give a dole to people out of work.

Well, I didn't think the word "socialism" ought to prevent any of us from saving the self-respect of men and women. They had to bring the army into Los Angeles, you know, to put women to work. I didn't live there at the time, but became fully acquainted with it later. There were thousands of women out of work, something like 24,000 or 25,000 unemployed women in the city of Los Angeles alone. (I think I'm correct about that.)

Douglas: Melvyn and I, on a trip by car, ran into some information that was very influential in my thinking. We stopped at Las Vegas. Las Vegas in those days was very different from the Las Vegas today. And we were told that people were coming across the country in boxcars, members of families--not families--but fathers that left their families because they couldn't face the Depression, the responsibility of a family with no way to earn a living; or children who left home --girls and boys--to cross the country.

There were at that time in some states in rural areas, groupings of young people like those one hears about today; communes where young people would be together, living on the land any way they could. A friend of ours, Dan Totheroh, wrote a play about that called Children of the Road.

Fry: Oh, is that right?

Douglas: They told us at Las Vegas that the first floor of many of the buildings--saloons, some of the hotels--were left open because so many of these people came through, they feared if they didn't leave the ground floors open, some might climb to the second floor.

Fry: To...

Douglas: To break in. They left open some place for them to sleep as they came through Las Vegas, afraid if they didn't, there might be trouble. Of course, the story of the Depression was so inescapable for anybody that could hear or read or see, but that was the first big tremendous personal impact on me.

Having been brought up in a family in which conservation, land, people, the health of the community and responsibility within the community to do one's share was recognized, the Depression certainly made a tremendous impression on me.

I had been so absorbed in my own work, my own goals, my own pleasure in my theater and what I was doing, that it took a long time to--blow me out of myself [laughing]--and become active. It was a continuing pressure of events that certainly affected me. It was never a decision. I decided I wanted to be an actress: I decided I wanted to be a singer; I didn't decide I wanted to get into public affairs; I didn't decide I wanted to go to Congress. It was the current of the times that happened to carry me along. It carried many people along. It carried me.

Fry: And because of your background, you could feel the responsibility.

Douglas: Yes. I mean, I tried to understand it. Why did it happen to me and not to my sister?

Fry: I wanted to ask you if your other brothers and sisters were...

Douglas: No! They became Democrats as a result of me. The Depression didn't carry them along in the same way. My younger brother Walter is a very public-minded, civic-minded person. He's head of many young people's programs, and helps them substantially. In Fort Lauderdale, where he has an apartment, he's been involved in a program to assist very young girls and boys overcome the drug habit. But this type of involvement, interested and concerned participation in civic affairs, was part of the family all along, remember, Republican or Democrat.

Mother never was a Democrat; but neither did she speak of herself as a Republican.

Fry: She was a quiet Republican.

Douglas: Yes.

I have continued work for the migrants up to the present day. We held the first meeting concerned with migrants, the first public hearing, after World War II in Washington. I can get you the exact date.

Fry: You spoke there probably?

Douglas: No, I was one of the committee hearing testimony. It was as though I were still in Congress. Our committee sat in back of a long table; in front of us were those testifying. Do you see? Farm workers, growers, in-between people, community people, organizations and so forth.

Fry: You were in Congress at that time?

Douglas: No. This was later, after '50 when I was no longer in Congress. It was the first meeting in Washington on the migrants after the war. I can send you some information on it to which you can refer.

Fry: We'll put that in that file.

Douglas: Yes, Fay Bennett, who was the executive secretary of the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor, was also for years an adviser to the southern sharecroppers. I'll send you her name and address and some of my material.

Democratic Party Work: Three Jobs, One Woman

Douglas: But, I think we're back at the '40 convention at which I was elected California's National Committeewoman. We have a fifty-fifty law in California. For every male chairman of the Democratic party, there must be a female co-chairman. Because the state is so large, it is politically divided into two parts, Northern and Southern California. Usually the state committee in convention elects a male chairman for the north and the south and two women as co-chairmen. The principal male chairmanship alternates between the north and south every two years. In 1940, the principal male chairmanship went to the north.

The arguments were so acrimonious and dragged out at the state convention that the delegates never got around to electing the female co-chairman, with the result that they voted at the last minute, unanimously, to empower the principal chairman to select the female co-chairwomen for the north and south. This fell to William Malone, who had been elected as the chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee for Northern California.

Shortly after the state convention, I had a telephone call from William Malone, "I'm coming down south to see you. When will it be convenient?" A time was arranged. It was an interesting interview. A very important interview in its aftereffects.

So he came to see me and explained what had happened at the state convention which I didn't attend. I had no part in the state organization at that time. He said, "I'm now in a position where I can name the woman who will work along with me as co-chairman, and I'm you." I said, "You can't do that; I'm national committeewoman!" He said, "I know. You're going to be state vice-chairman too." I said, "I can't do both jobs. I just won't be able to do anything as state vice-chairman." Then he said, "That's the whole idea. I don't want to talk to three women--I just want to talk to one! To you as national committeewoman, to you as vice-chairman of the north and the south!" So I said, "I really can't accept." He said, "You don't have to accept--I'm just naming you. The less you do, the better!" [laughter]

Well, that was his mistake. I set up an office in Los Angeles with my own money. I advised the women--I thought that was why that little piece in the paper was interesting. I'm sure it goes back to my national committee days.

Fry: Which one? The letter that just came out in the Washington Post?

Douglas: Not the letter, but the quote--the acrostic. Because women came to me when I was named vice-chairman-- it didn't happen as national committeewoman, but as vice-chairman--they came to me and said, "Now, we have to have certain things, and we've simply got to make the men listen to us." And so right from the beginning I said, "Look, I was brought up in a family of three brothers and a very strong father and I tell you there's no way to make men listen to you because they're not going to listen to you. The only way to have a voice in politics is to build strength at the grass roots. Now, I don't know how we're going to go about that, but that's what we've got to do."

The women's division had always taken money from the men's division before to run their office, so I said, "We can't accept money from the men and be independent of them. It's just impossible. We're going to have our own office."

I opened another office in Northern California in San Francisco. Catherine Bauer, who was the distinguished housing and community developer--married to Bill Wurster the architect--was one of my women's division co-chairmen in the north and the other woman had been the head of the League of Women Voters.

In the south, I named Esther Murray; she was very close to Mrs. Malbone Graham. She and her husband were professors at the University of California in Los Angeles. Mrs. Graham did a study for the United States before the war on school books used in early grades of Japanese schools which indicated a conditioning for war. She was very knowledgeable about foreign affairs.

Esther Murray was in the Association of University Women and was one of the key people on the Foreign Policy Committee. I remember the first time I met her at a luncheon, right after I was named. We talked about foreign policy, the approaching war and Hitler, and I said, "I wish that you would be active in politics." I said, "Oh, you just want to work, not accomplish, let the men stop it all at the top, is that it? You only want to go half-way up the road?" [laughter]

Well anyway, I persuaded her to be my co-chairman. And Leisa Bronson, who is still here (whose address I must give you) in Los Angeles was another co-chairman in the south. These women had not been active before. We had many women who were active, but these were women who were specialist in their fields, you know.

The first two years of my work as vice-chairman were given over almost entirely to education. Mrs. Malbone Graham made charts for us; Esther Murray and I traveled around all of Southern California speaking to women's groups showing them what was happening, why we had to prepare, why we had to support the president.

Douglas: Melvyn had been very active in the William Allen White Committee and in the Fight for Freedom Committee. He'd given speeches around the country with both of those organizations. He and I talked about foreign policy all the time.

Catherine Bauer's conversations with Bill Malone which would be related to me were very amusing, to say the least. [laughter]

We introduced a new kind of emphasis among the women. For instance, you asked the question about my acquaintance with issues, which had impressed you when you looked at my record--for instance, housing in California. We were supporting public housing and the way we supported it was by renting buses, taking women to the slums to see them and to see the first public housing that was being erected and to expose them to what was needed. We went about all state problems this way. Whether it was the migrants in the fields or the city slums which needed to be replaced by public housing or concern for the rights of the blacks. Whatever it was.

Before I went to Washington, right at the beginning of the war, when I was national committeewoman, I held a meeting--I think the first in the country--in my house talking with blacks about the need for a Fair Employment Practices Commission.

Fry: Oh, was this called the Federal Bill?

Douglas: It was meeting on the need for such a bill, so there would be fair employment for blacks in the factories. I carried responsibilities of both positions for four years, from 1940 to 1944.

Pearl Harbor came. I remember the day of Pearl Harbor. The National Youth Administration was meeting with me in my home. Melvyn was in Washington; he was a volunteer in a civilian program of Mrs. Roosevelt's to organize actors and writers in support of educational programs for the country, the producers, manufacturers, and so forth.

The president had begun to cut back on National Youth Administration programs just before Pearl Harbor. It was obvious that if war came, we weren't prepared. We were beginning to cut back on our various government programs. The NYA orchestra for Southern California had been eliminated. The whole orchestra came to see me on the memorable day of Pearl Harbor to beg me to intercede with the government. In the middle of the conversation, there was a telephone call for me. I went out of the drawing room to answer. When I returned I said, "I'm sorry. There'll be no more NYA orchestras for awhile--not in Southern California; not in Northern California or anywhere else. We're at war. We've been attacked at Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. You'll probably be going into the army."

Douglas: I remember how they got up, one by one, one with a fiddle under an arm, another with a cello, another with a horn and so on, you know. They walked silently out of the room. I never will forget that afternoon, never will forget their faces.

Fry: Was this a youth orchestra?

Douglas: Yes, a National Youth Administration orchestra. The National Youth Administration had many kinds of projects supporting young musicians. Leopold Stokowski headed a Northern California young people's orchestra. They really did play beautifully. The WPA [Works Progress Administration] also had any number of projects. Do you remember the toy loan program set up for older people and children?

Fry: Oh no, I don't.

Douglas: Well, there was a program designed to put older people who had no money (we had no social security then) and were in desperate need, to work. They had to be supported, to be given jobs. They had some skills. So they were paid to work on discarded toys. The toys of families that could afford to buy new toys were collected by the community. Money was not involved. Money was spent only for salaries. All supplies, paint, wire, fabrics were donated, as I remember, by factories and companies that had bits and pieces left over that they couldn't sell en masse. The only money spent in that program was for the workers themselves. They restored these toys.

The toys were more beautiful than when new. Then they were placed in Toy Libraries. Children who'd never owned a toy would go into the library to borrow a doll, and a child would be given the doll for two weeks or three weeks or whatever time the child asked to have it. The child had a toy to play with and learned to take care of the toy because it was going to be used by another child. I thought it one of the most beautiful programs we had in the WPA.

Fry: Was this typical of what you were concerned with when you were on the National WPA Advisory Committee appointed by President Roosevelt?

Douglas: Yes.

Fry: Was your work there primarily with youth?

Douglas: No, no, old people, too, in programs for the old and the young. I was fascinated by WPA work. And of course, it was very educational for me. I traveled around the country visiting various projects. I never went into anything that I didn't study, if possible, first-hand.

Fry: Were you reading anything in this period, in the middle and late thirties? If so, what was it? You read things relating to farm economy, labor problems?

Douglas: Yes. Yes, Agriculture Department and Farm Security material. The WPA had its literature--voluminous. I would just sit and do nothing but read all day long. The NYA had its projects. It was the same with all of the New Deal programs. They were diverse!

Fry: Depending on the need, I guess.

Douglas: Depending on who was in need, whether it was the young or the old or the middle aged--who had talents, who could do what kind of work. Orson Welles started his career in the WPA theater. There was a WPA artist program for painters. The gathering of material about the Indians was another WPA project. And such paintings!

One of the most beautiful books published were pictures of Indian sand paintings--perfectly beautiful! Must be in the California library. They must have it. It would be interesting for you to see what they have at the university on WPA programs.

Fry: Oh, I run across things all the time that were done by the WPA.

Douglas: Yes, it was very creative and constructive.

Fry: There's also a black history, slave history, a history of the theater in California, and just things that would never ever have been done otherwise.

Douglas: And so it was that by serving on the WPA Advisory Committee helped prepare me for the Congress.

For many, many years I felt very strongly about the treatment of blacks. When I became national committeewoman and state vice-chairman, one of the first meetings we had was in Long Beach in Southern California. I sent word that any invitation for any Democratic meeting which the women headed must be sent to ALL Democrats. Word came back, "What do you mean, all Democrats?"

"I mean ALL Democrats--all minorities, everybody. Anybody who's a Democrat--the Democratic party isn't a private club."

One day a telephone call came through from the woman in charge of the meeting at Long Beach. She was hysterical. "What am I going to do, what am I going to do? We've sent out the notices to everybody. The blacks are coming. The men say they won't come!"

I said, "Well, why are you so excited?"

Douglas: She said, "What are we to do?"

"We don't DO anything. Just go on arranging for the meeting."

"But the men won't come."

I said, "They don't have to come. It's their privilege."

Fry: Long Beach was a pretty white community then, wasn't it?

Douglas: Yes. It didn't matter. We still had our meeting.

That was the beginning of accepting blacks, inviting blacks to all functions.

Mel and I had a big house and grounds. Therefore, I gave the annual Democratic party when I was national committeewoman and state vice-chairman, to raise money for the women's division, at our home. Fifteen hundred to two thousand Democrats would come. Fortunately they didn't come at one time.

State officials came, including Governor Olson. I have some pictures (maybe they could be photostatted) of the NYA orchestra in our patio with Governor Olson, Mrs. Roosevelt, Tommy, her secretary, and the man who was head of--I think something to do with Farm Security in the area; not one of the top men but a very prominent man. Anyway, it's a charming picture.

Fry: Oh fine. Yes, we can copy any pictures like that.

Douglas: When I think if it's right to do something, I do it without a whole lot of conversation.

Fry: Did you have any kickback on the fact that the party was at your house?

Douglas: I started to tell you--this party was the first one we had since I was in office. Everybody was invited, just as everyone had been invited to the Long Beach meeting. The first people to arrive were two or three cars full of black women, including one woman I'll never forget--she must have been 350 pounds.

On arriving at the house, you came into a courtyard and came up steps onto a porch which ran the length of the house. I greeted everyone on the porch. There was a foyer, on the left of it the drawing room, and the dining room on the right. In the other part of the house were the bedrooms. People would go right through the foyer to the patio in the back of the house. It was very large. But the early visitors went into the foyer, then into the drawing room and sat on either side of the fireplace.

Fry: In the living room.

Douglas: The next guests that came in were two Democratic ladies from Georgia visiting one of our Los Angeles Democratic women. [laughter] They said they were so pleased to come to my house, to Melvyn's house, it was "just beautiful" and it was "such a pleasure;" they "just loved it so." They got as far as the foyer when they saw the group of black women in the living room sitting around the fireplace. They quickly went on through to the patio, turned and came out again through the foyer to the porch saying, "So sorry, we have to leave. We're so sorry we have to leave. Very nice to meet you, very nice to meet you, Mrs. Douglas." I looked at the Georgia ladies and I said, "I understand. But you see, this is the Democratic party." [laughter] "I know why you're leaving. You needn't apologize, but this is the way it is in California."

I had that same reaction from southerners again and again. I decided one of the secretaries in my congressional office should be black, since one of the four assembly districts I represented was made up of black citizens. I thought it wiser to wait until my second term to hire one, which would give the Congress a chance to know me. I would be the first white congressman in the House or the Senate to hire a black secretary. I wanted to let the rather permanent, namely, the southern congressmen, know me; give them time to realize I was no bomb thrower.

In the beginning of my second term, at the office in Los Angeles, Florence Reynolds, my California secretary, began interviewing possible black secretaries. She had no success. I had stipulated that the black secretary must be able to hold her own in the office. I knew it would do no good in opening the way to hiring black secretaries if we settled for an incompetent one. Just to have a black face in the office was not what I was after. I despised that kind of appointment. Such appointments did nothing to change white hiring attitudes. After months of searching and interviewing and turning down the recommendations of the black assemblymen, we chose Juanita Terry. (I refer you to her interview, which covers her background and her arrival in Congress.)

Juanita came from an educated family. Mrs. Terry had a very responsible job in the housing program. She was well known and highly respected by all those working in housing, in Southern California.

In my Washington office, I had three secretaries, one of whom was a southerner; her family still lived in Alabama. The secretaries were very pleased to learn that Juanita was joining the staff. When Juanita arrived she was greeted warmly by everyone. I had a real

Douglas: shock when Evelyn [Chavoor] came to me the first day Juanita was in office and said she just learned that no black secretary would be allowed to eat in the congressional dining room or congressional cafeteria.

I regretted I had to tell Juanita, her first day in the office, such unhappy news about the Congress of the United States. I told Juanita she would never have to eat alone; someone would go across the street to the Supreme Court, where black secretaries were allowed to eat in the dining room. It was an unhappy business. I trusted Juanita's refinement and good sense, but I nevertheless made it clear that she didn't have to struggle for acceptance on the Hill and that I would see to it that the rule restricting black secretaries was changed.

The first few months, work in our office ran smoothly. Juanita was an excellent secretary and was learning fast the routine Evelyn and I had worked out for office procedures. One day the southern secretary came into my private office and asked if she could talk to me. I said, "Yes, of course. Sit down."

"Mrs. Douglas, my mother is very ill. I have to return to Alabama to be with her. I do hope this isn't going to upset the office routine. When I return, if I can do something special for you, I do hope you'll call on me."

I was surprised and tried not to let her see my disappointment. She was one of the best secretaries on the Hill. Her leaving would, for a time, upset the routine of the office, but that was not why I was disappointed. I supposed her family had been pressing her to leave, and that she'd finally given in. I told her I knew why she was leaving; that she needn't explain further; she'd been very courageous.

I guessed what it had cost her emotionally to stay on working with Juanita. "You've been absolutely correct in your behavior. You performed your duties as usual. If you don't feel comfortable, you must leave, of course. I'm sorry, but I do understand. I hope there will come a time when you can work with someone like Juanita comfortably. I thank you for having made the effort."

After my southern secretary left, I told Juanita to remember that I am making the argument for fair treatment of the blacks whenever the issue arises in the House of Representatives. You can help by becoming one of the very best secretaries on the Hill. Juanita became just that, and worked on the Hill until her retirement age.

Douglas: Southerners came into the office to see me about a housing bill the Banking and Currency Committee had held up in their committee. I'd placed a petition on the Speaker's desk. There'd been considerable publicity about the bill, my petition, and my efforts to obtain enough votes (51% of the members of the House) to bring the bill before the full House for a vote. Southern congressmen had been particularly reluctant to sign the petition. My visitors wanted to know why their representatives hadn't signed.

They were utterly amazed and taken back when they saw a black secretary in a congressional office. Curious, they went over to her desk to talk with her. Juanita was impressive; she was handsome, cultivated and highly intelligent.

When I received the southerners in my private office, it was some time before I could get them to talk about the housing bill. The conversation went something like this:

"You have a black secretary, Mrs. Douglas."

"Yes, I do. Now, I suppose, you want a list of the southern congressmen who haven't signed the petition."

"Yes, of course we want those names. But, will you tell us first if your black secretary is efficient? Does she hold her own with the white secretaries?"

After such preliminaries about the talents of Juanita, we got down to the business of the housing bill and the number of names I still needed on my petition. You know, I found that many times southerners can be very understanding, better in some ways than northerners.

Fry: In accepting something new?

Douglas: In understanding which has to come first. In understanding the blacks and in appreciating the deleterious effects of discrimination.

Fry: That's interesting.

Douglas: For instance, Dr. Frank Graham (former president of the University of North Carolina, later North Carolina's U.S. Senator, and after that, serving as a United Nations negotiator in India) and Philip Randolph (head of the Sleeping Car Porters Union) were co-chairmen of a citizens committee formed at the end of the war to investigate working conditions of migrant farm workers.

Their relationship was very close. There was a mutual understanding of what whites and blacks in the South had been through, of what separated them, of what had to be overcome--the time it would

Douglas: take, what had to happen in the educational system, all of it. It was very easy for northerners to think they were different from southerners in their attitudes toward blacks. But you see what happened when blacks began to move out of the South into the North after World War II demanding a decent education for their children and well-paid jobs. Then, personal bias and fears were manifested. Instead of approaching the black problem with real objectivity, for the good of all.

Fry: A problem which was being handled as a new thing in the North, whereas in the South, both parties have been painfully aware of it for a long time.

Douglas: Right, exactly.

Fry: I wonder if you could explain to us, Helen, what portions and people in the party supported you most when you first went in as Democratic committeewoman and on through to '44.

Douglas: Well, I had the majority of those on the 1940 delegation and I certainly had labor support. You'd have to get the original list of the delegation.

For instance, George Creel, a friend of mine, urged me to accept the office of national committeewoman if my name was proposed at the convention. I saw him at his home in San Francisco just before leaving for Chicago on the convention train. I don't think he was a member of the delegation. Later, in 1950, George Creel headed a committee of Democrats that opposed me.

Fry: He started with you?

Douglas: Yes, he was with me in 1940. He was opposed to my challenging Senator Downey for the Senate seat in the primaries. And in the 1950 finals, he supported Nixon.

Mrs. Mattison Boyd Jones was on the Creel committee opposing me in 1950. At the convention in 1940, support for her candidacy for national committeewoman just washed out. She could never forgive me for winning.

Fry: Everyone expected Olson to sort of hand it to her, apparently.

Douglas: I don't know about that. In any case, I wasn't campaigning for national committeewoman. It was the last thing in the world I thought of being. As I went around the state, people would come up and say to me, "You should be the next Democratic National Committeewoman." But, you know, I just didn't pay much attention

Douglas: except for the fact that it was so often repeated. I remember saying to Melvyn--he's forgotten it now--"What do you suppose the national committeewoman does that makes so many people want me to take it on?" [laughter]

I didn't plan to be national committeewoman. It happened--just like that--at the convention. No one had come to me before I went to Chicago and said I was going to be the next national committee-woman--that they were going to nominate me.

When Melvyn arrived in Chicago, a number of labor men on the delegation asked him, "If Mrs. Douglas's name is proposed as national committeewoman, do you think she'll turn it down?" And he said, "I don't know. Ask her."

Fry: I noticed afterwards he had to deny to the press that he'd helped you become the national committeewoman. [laughter]

Douglas: Who, Olson?

Fry: No, your husband.

Douglas: Oh, he didn't. Melvyn had nothing to do with it, nothing whatsoever!

Fry: But apparently it was necessary for him to make a public statement to this effect.

Douglas: Probably because of something Mrs. Mattison Boyd Jones said. I paid no attention to what people said. I was always too busy doing my thing. I wasn't interested in the machinations and the maneuverings of politics. I really wasn't--then or now.

Fry: And this was, practically speaking, unexpected for you at that time?

Douglas: Neither Melvyn nor I had anything to do with my becoming national committeewoman. Just as I didn't expect to be a member of Congress and never worked toward going to Congress. Nor did I work toward being a Senator. I didn't make periodic trips to California--I suppose that was a mistake as I look back on it. [laughing] I didn't come out to California and lay the groundwork for a Senate campaign by establishing statewide contacts two years ahead of the primary. That is what Bill Malone and other Democratic leaders wanted me to do. They didn't want me to run in 1949. "Don't run now. Run two years from now, and we'll give you strong Democratic support."

Of course, their main interest was to keep Senator Sheridan Downey in the U.S. Congress. While my purpose in running was to get Sheridan Downey out of the U.S. Senate. Well, I succeeded. [laughter]

Douglas: It gave the Interior Department a breathing spell. It saved the 160-acre limitation up to this day, although what's happening in the Interior Department now looks very suspicious.

Fry: When Ford asked you to take over his seat in Congress, you had become educated on the reclamation issues and on the acreage limitation?

Douglas: Oh yes, yes. In 1939 I was thoroughly acquainted with the 1902 Reclamation Act embodying the 160-acre limitation of ownership on federally irrigated land.

Fry: What did you do as co-chairman of Civilian Defense? What does that mean?

Douglas: It was a civilian program to mobilize civilian conservation in support of the war; to conserve in the use of certain needed basic war materials. For instance, when I was informed that there was a need for civilians to conserve gasoline, I was expected to educate the public and implement the restriction of gas consumption. It was reasonably successful.

When there was concern lest we run out of aluminum, I had a large bin constructed and placed in front of the Los Angeles Federal Building, where as chairman I had my office, into which housewives were asked to throw their aluminum pots and pans. I set the example. The kitchen in our new house was supplied with brand new aluminum cookware. The morning of the first day of the drive I dumped every aluminum artifact from my kitchen into the bin in front of the Federal Building.

It was at the request of the government that the states initiated conservation programs and drives. Washington informed us of shortages or probable shortages. It was up to us to obtain civilian cooperation. We had nothing to do with physical defense should we be attacked. I was co-chairman of greater Los Angeles. Civilian defense chairmen were appointed by President Roosevelt. I suppose they thought chairmen in the states would work harder if they were appointed by the president.

Fry: And this was when Olson was governor?

Douglas: Yes, when Culbert Olson was governor.

Civilian defense was organized, of course, after Pearl Harbor.

Fry: The biggest point of contention between Earl Warren and Olson was civil defense in the state.

Douglas: In the state?

Fry: In the state. This was when Warren was attorney general, and he says it was what finally made him conclude he should run for governor, because this issue was such a thorn in his side. I wondered if you were aware of any of this on a state level.

Douglas: No, I wasn't. You know I opposed Earl Warren in his successful campaign for the governorship of California. When he was appointed to the Supreme Court, I didn't expect Warren would turn out to be one of our greatest Chief Justices.

You see, his behavior as governor was often inexplicable to me. He'd state a positive position in support of certain key bills and then his people would work overtime to kill them. The housing bill was an exception.

Fry: By his people...

Douglas: I mean Governor Warren's leaders in the state legislature.

Fry: Do you know who they were?

Douglas: I don't remember. When you talk to Al Meyers, he can give you that information, I think. Some of the speeches I made at that time were based on what seemed to me Governor Warren's "double-talk" administration. That was the basis of my opposition to him, aside from the fact that he was a Republican and I was a Democrat. One must take that into consideration. [laughter]

Fry: A lot of Democrats didn't; they voted for him.

Douglas: Yes, and you know, that certainly influenced me. I probably wasn't as objective as I should have been.

Fry: But you said "except for housing."

Douglas: Warren seemed to be consistent all the way through on housing.

Fry: What about his push for a state medical health plan?

Douglas: Governor Warren certainly talked as though he favored a state medical plan--but, I don't want to be more specific. I'd have to have my papers before me to see exactly what I thought of the health plan. If you should go to Oklahoma again, it might be of interest to read some of the speeches I made during the Warren governorship.

Douglas: I'm such a wholehearted admirer today of Chief Justice Warren, it embarrasses me to say anything derogatory about him when he served as governor of California. I can't help thinking I must have misjudged him.

Fry: In 1946 Bob Kenny ran against him, but that was when you didn't even come back into the state for your own campaign, so you were not too involved with that. So your speeches were mainly in '42.

Were you involved at all in the reactions to the Japanese evacuations?

Douglas: Yes. I talked often by phone to Harold Ickes. He was opposed to the Japanese evacuation; he thought it unwarranted and a great injustice to our Japanese citizens. I was distressed about the evacuation, but I was of two minds about it. California citizens were so fearful at the start of the war, fearful that there would be an attack on the West Coast any night, that I wasn't sure the Japanese-Americans would be safe in Los Angeles. I visited the Los Angeles camp. I wanted to see it. I wasn't one of those who came out and said, "This is right, we have to do it." I was rather neutral on the issue because I wasn't absolutely sure, you know, whether this was. Would it have been foolhardy to leave them free? Were the camps a protection? God knows, the Japanese certainly behaved magnificently in Pearl Harbor.

Fry: But we didn't know that then.

Douglas: We didn't know it? What do you mean, we didn't know it. We didn't evacuate the Japanese until after Pearl Harbor.

Fry: What I was referring to was, we didn't know that the reports of the Hawaiian-Japanese sabotage were false until after the war.

Douglas: Right, right.

Fry: Were you aware of the role of the Associated Farmers in that Japanese evacuation decision?

Douglas: No.

Fry: Was this one of the things that you educated the Democratic women about? You took them around to visit the camps?

Douglas: No, I didn't. I took only a few women with me when I visited the L.A. camp. It would have been indecent to add to the distress and humiliation of the Japanese families by leading a parade of women through the camp. No, I didn't take a busload of Democratic women into the camp.

Douglas: It was quite different when our state Democratic office arranged for two or three busloads to drive and walk through some areas of L.A. There was a housing matter before the city council; we were invited and welcomed into certain apartments and houses by their owners. They wanted us to see how they were living in the hope that we could help them. I visited the camp to see if everything possible was being done to make living in it bearable for the Japanese families of women, children and men. If not, I intended to propose changes at the state and national level.

Fry: Do you remember anything about preparing the communities for their return?

Douglas: No. I was in Washington. But, many Japanese suits to regain properties taken from them at the time of the evacuation came through my office.

As I told you, in World War II, my brother Walter was a major on the General Staff of the Eastern Defense Command in the Civil Affairs Division of the United States Army. After VE Day and before VJ Day, my brother and Colonel Durham were directed by General Grunert, Commanding General of the Eastern and Southern Defense Commands, to evaluate and report on the risk of danger to those commands from sabotage or espionage which might possibly be committed by Nisei citizens who were about to be released from the encampments where they were confined. The question to be evaluated was whether or not those released should be coded and placed into IBM computers and whether or not other restraints should be imposed on their movements within these commands.

The files which they were to evaluate were in the Western Defense Command at the Presidio in San Francisco. Colonel Durham and my brother Walter spent two-and-one-half months examining the files. The staff then suggested that they could show them pictures of the camps. Colonel Durham wasn't interested in pictures; he wanted to go with Walter into the camps and visit the people.

Arrangments were made for them to fly in a bomber to the Tule Lake Camp. When they arrived their escort suggested they visit certain homes, pointing them out. Colonel Durham bypassed his suggestions and pointing out a house not previously mentioned, said he wanted to visit that home.

In the house they met a little woman with two or three children around her. She told them her husband and brother were fighting for the United States in the all-Japanese Army Regiment. That regiment, Chita, so distinguished itself during the war that it received more citations than any regiment in the history of the United States. On the wall of the house there hung gold, silver, and bronze stars.

Douglas: The recommendation that Colonel Durham and Major Gahagan made to General Grunert was that the Japanese people were in no way to be restricted or coded. They were no threat or risk to the command. Care was taken to write the report in such a way as to explain the hysteria and lack of defense on the West Coast which caused the Japanese to be put into camps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese government.

The report and recommendations of Colonel Dunham and Major Gahagan were followed; Colonel Dunham received a Legion of Merit for the report, and my brother, Major Gahagan, a commendation.

Fry: Well, I'll be interested in knowing more about what the army's role was. You know, we have information on what Bob Kenny's attorney general's office did, and all this sort of thing, but not too much on the army's participation in that. It was a very tricky thing.

Douglas: Well, sometime, if you should come to Vermont when Walter is there, you can tape him (I'm sure he would be willing to do it) on this issue.

Fry: Oh, I'd love to. And if he has anything written on it, we'd like to have it. We have an enormous collection on the Japanese evacuation at the Bancroft. So, we'd like to collect anything that goes with that.

All right. As state vice-chairman, could you give us some indication of the results of your efforts to make the women more conscious of issues? Did this really affect the role, then, that they were given?

Douglas: Yes.

Fry: What I'm interested to know is if they really got into more policy making levels in the part. Did they?

Douglas: Yes, they did.

Fry: More than stuffing envelopes then?

Douglas: Yes. Read the record of what happened in the following years in the state committee--women held top party positions in the state.

III IN CONGRESS

Running for Congress, 1944

Fry: Are you ready to go into your race for Congress?

Douglas: Now, I want to tell you how I happened to run for Ford's seat, after Pearl Harbor, but let me go back a bit.

Melvyn and I were strong supporters of Franklin Roosevelt. Melvyn was an active member of the William Allen White Committee and later of the Fight for Freedom Committee. After Pearl Harbor, Melvyn worked as a volunteer in the Office of Civilian Defense under the direction of James Landis. Because of his work with the William Allen White Committee and of the Fight for Freedom Committee, though just "over age" he felt that he had to interrupt his contract with M.G.M. He volunteered for serve in the army, as a private in December of 1942.

Thomas F. Ford was the congressman from the 14th District in Los Angeles, for which I ran in 1944. He had served in Congress for twelve years. He had a record in support of Franklin Roosevelt. He was secure in his seat, but he was tired and he was old. At that point--1944--the Democrats couldn't afford to lose the 14th District seat. Both Tom and Roosevelt feared it would be lost if Tom didn't run. It wasn't enough that a Democrat would replace Tom; it must be a Democrat who would support Roosevelt and believe in the Roosevelt program.

And so Tom Ford begged me (it began a year before), "Won't you run for Congress?" I said, "Oh, Tom, don't be ridiculous. I'm not going to run for Congress!"

But then when Melvyn went into the army as a private and later went overseas (he became an officer before he went overseas),

Douglas: Lillian Ford, Tom's wife, said to me one day, "Helen, are you going to stop now your work as national committeewoman and state vice-chairman and go back to the theater?"

I said, "I can't do that until I finish the terms of office."

And she said, "Well, you're just hooked. You might just as well do something worthwhile. Go to the Congress. Now you go run for Tom's seat and you'll get elected. [laughing] You'll go and help Roosevelt. That's going to be much more useful than anything else you may do."

Mrs. Roosevelt came into the state, before I finally signed up and registered to be in the campaign. And she said to me, "Helen, make very sure you can win this race. You know, Franklin has asked you to run. But I think he just would like to have you in Washington. You make very sure you can win this race or don't run."

That's how I came to run in 1944. An irony is that Philip Connelly who was thought to be a Communist, opposed me and tried to mobilize support against me. I did have labor support though, because of my work with the migrants and my support of Franklin Roosevelt's program as national committeewoman. I had the garment workers' support always, both the CIO and the AFL. Sidney Hillman, one of the national CIO leaders, was a very strong supporter of mine that first time I ran. He was a strong supporter until he died.

Fry: Your identification with the Political Action Committee of CIO seemed to be an issue in the Los Angeles Times.

Douglas: Oh, of course. It was from the beginning, you know.

Fry: The Times saw this as putting you out beyond the pale?

Douglas: Oh, of course, of course, that's right.

Fry: The other issue that I picked up in the newspapers was that you were charged with "carpetbagging" because you lived in a different congressional district.

Douglas: Yes, right. This was so much so an issue that the newspapermen, some of them, told me afterwards [laughing] that when I went to file, they said, "Mrs. Douglas has filed, and you'd better write that she can't file. She doesn't live in that district." And one of the newspapermen said to them, "You'd better not write it until you find out whether she can. If she's registering for the 14th District, she knows something you don't know." They were not aware of the fact that the law permitted me to run in a district in which I did not live.



Helen Gahagan Douglas after her first campaign for Congress--taken at back of her house, 1944.



Campaign planning, 1944. From left: Catherine Bauer, Bill Malone, Helen Gahagan Douglas, Julia Porter.

Fry: It was legal, yes.

Douglas: Yes. Mayor LaGuardia, you know, ran in a district where he didn't live. I knew that. Tom Ford knew that; Lillian Ford knew that. There wasn't anything they didn't know about political organization.

Fry: There was an effort, right after you got in the Congress, to put a bill through our legislature in Sacramento to outlaw such goings-on.

Douglas: And there's another bill now. Have you seen recently that you only have to be thirty days in the area to vote locally on local issues?

Fry: Yes.

Douglas: Very good, very good.

Well, do you want to ask any more questions, to get them out of the way?

Fry: Let me see what we have here on our list. Was John Baumgartner your campaign manager?

Douglas: Honorary, and a very strong supporter.

Fry: Who was he?

Douglas: He was a very close friend of Tom Ford's, a Republican, and a member of the board of supervisors.

Fry: I have him down as your campaign manager. Is that right?

Douglas: No, but he had an official position of some kind--maybe he was campaign chairman. Maybe they called him campaign chairman the first time I ran. He was very prominent in Los Angeles, and a very close friend of Tom's and Lillian's. He was a great supporter of mine, in each election. It was important to have his support.

Fry: Well, I'm curious about the campaign itself. The newspaper says you won in the primary over six men.

Douglas: I think there were more than six men. One of the men was president of the city council, a man by the name of Bennett.

Fry: Oh, yes. He seemed to be your most prominent opponent in the primary.

Douglas: Well, he was the most prominent opponent.

Fry: And you had your Republican opponent in William Campbell, then, after the primary?

Douglas: Yes.

Fry: What kind of a race did he give you--what kind of a campaign?

Campaigning

Douglas: I don't remember. [pause] No, I want to tell you now who ran my campaign. Ed Lybeck and his wife Ruth. They had run Tom Ford's campaigns. Ed was an old newspaperman. He was very good. He did the kind of work that the Kennedys were known for in their campaigns and that others have copied in campaigns since: organize assembly districts street by street, get party affiliations of voters from the registrar of voters, telephone and call on all Democrats house by house. The 1944 campaign was a really well-organized house-to-house, the same kind of campaign Ed Lybeck had organized for Tom Ford.

Florence Reynolds (whom you may talk to, and I'll give you her address) was Tom Ford's secretary. She also became mine, for Los Angeles. She stayed right in the federal building in the same office Tom had had.

The only difference I had with Tom Ford was on the black issue. Tom Ford said to me, "Helen, I only have one bit of advice to give you. I hope that you will seriously consider what I'm about to say. In your congressional district, you have one black assembly district." The blacks were very great admirers of Tom Ford. He'd done a lot for them. "You must never go into the black district. You must always have them come to you in the Federal Building."

I said, "But, Tom, won't I be going into the other districts?"

"Yes, yes, of course. But you must not go into the black district. It will demean you." Something to that effect, you see.

So, he went back to Washington, and the first meeting I had in the Federal Building, I said to Florence Reynolds, "I want to make some calls in the black district."

She looked at me. "All right." And so I went. Word got around, you know, very quickly. I stopped in houses and shops, spoke to people, visited. Tom Ford had never done this, though he

Douglas: had of course held meetings in the district of the black people. Black constituents, if they wanted to see him or visit with him, had to arrange for an appointment and come to his office in the Federal Building. By going to the black assembly district and visiting the voters there as I did in every other district was another step toward integration. Tom Ford felt that blacks would not respect me if I went into their district on the same basis as I would be going into other districts. It seemed impossible to me that I could represent one whole assembly district and treat those in it differently from voters in other districts.

I had a visit to my office in the Federal Building from a group of men. They came to see me right after that walk through the district. They began with, "Mrs. Douglas, we have come (they were blacks) to tell you that you have our support, and we're very glad to support you in this election."

I thanked them very much. Then they said, "Now, what are you going to pay us for our support?" to which I replied, "I'm not going to pay you anything."

[with consternation] "What do you mean?"

"Everyone working in my campaign is a volunteer."

[shocked tone] "Well, then, we can't work for you!"

"That's your privilege," I said. "I hope to be your spokesman in Congress, and if I were to buy your support, I couldn't speak for you with any pride. That's not possible."

That news went out too, just as if I'd cried out to the district. It was known--just like that. So then the real leaders came, and the support I had was substantial. Not only that, but my work with the National Youth Administration and the WPA, and my support of equal treatment for blacks in the NYA program and in the Farm Security Camps was known--before the 1944 campaign. That was the only difference, I would say, in my campaign and Tom Ford's.

Fry: Did you have Mexican-Americans in that district?

Douglas: [calling out] Melvyn, do you remember Back-of-the-Yards? [pause] You don't. But the man in Chicago who had that Back-of-the-Yards, what was his name?

Fry: He used to teach there?

Douglas: That's right. What was his name?

Fry: Saul Alinsky?

Douglas: That's right. While I was National Democratic Committeewoman for the State of California, Saul Alinsky came to California. He saw Melvyn, talked to him about the need to help the Mexicans. Mel gave the first money that went into Los Angeles in support of the Saul Alinsky program there. That was before we went to war.

The Saul Alinsky program in Los Angeles was a little over the line out of my district. Most of that Mexican district was in the next assembly district, between [Congressman] Chet Holifield's and mine. But I certainly had the Mexican support and the Filipino support in the 1950 campaign throughout the state. I had black support. I had the farm workers' support. I had divided labor support in the building trade unions after the Korean War broke out, after the primaries. Walter Reuther and his brother were supporters of mine, and both of the garment workers' unions. I had strong labor support.

Fry: Was this district primarily a laboring man's district?

Douglas: No, no. The Fourteenth Congressional District was, at that time, the area of the Los Angeles city hall--north and south, going to the right and left. If you're coming downtown, to the right of city hall would have been in the assembly district with the preponderantly black population. Before Pearl Harbor, there was a concentration of Japanese in the Fourteenth District but they were removed, you remember. There was a Chinese area, you know, a little bit to the left of the station.

Fry: Oh, yes.

Douglas: The district came up Wilshire Boulevard, just beyond the Ambassador Hotel. So the Fourteenth District had upper middle class, lower middle class and workers. There were little houses on either side, and those apartment houses--

Fry: I wanted to ask you, now that I've turned the tape, if you would make that last point again--that you did have this middle class section of people from the southern United States, and that therefore you stand on issues concerning the Negroes--

Douglas: Oh, yes. It wasn't all that easy. The district wasn't a pushover at all. I mean a pushover for anything that I was working for.

Fry: Did you crossfile both times?

Douglas: Yes.

Fry: Why did you crossfile?

Douglas: Everybody did.

Fry: How did you come out with the Republicans that time?

Douglas: I've forgotten those figures.

Fry: Well, I really didn't mean the figures, because we can look them up. The newspapers, for some reason, didn't seem to have--

Douglas: The newspapers didn't carry very much.

Fry: But I thought maybe you saw some aspect of Republican support that you could then count on in that district.

Douglas: Yes.

Fry: Did you have some liberal Republican support?

Douglas: Baumgartner was a Republican. Yes. I always had some Republican support, but that's not unusual, just the way Republicans have some Democratic support. They were liberal Republicans, you know.

I was a supporter of Roosevelt. There was no doubt about that. So if they hated Roosevelt, they'd hate me, you know. I admired Mrs. Roosevelt, I admired her stands. And it was the same.

Fry: Well, in '46 you almost won the nominations from both Republicans and Democrats.

Douglas: Yes. I didn't come home to campaign in '46. I went to the UN in '46.

Fry: So, it was '48 when you had the close one, when your Republican opponent had the recount?

Douglas: No, I won by my largest majority in 1948. That's when J.B. Elliott said, "If you can't beat them, you join them." [laughter]

Fry: Okay, we'll get to that. I can't think of any other questions to ask you on the political aspects of your first running for Congress.

Douglas: I think the important facts about it are that I was persuaded to run by Tom Ford and Roosevelt. Melvyn was overseas. I was alone. I had let our help go, in the house. Melvyn's son Gregory, who was attending college, and Melvyn's brother and his wife and two children, and his mother were with me because there just wasn't any housing to be had. And I had my two little children, too.

Fry: You still had two children at home--

Douglas: I had two little children, little ones. But I had some skilled, experienced people running the campaign, which allowed me to campaign and present the issues. I had one very amusing experience.

Tom Ford said, "Helen, I think it would be advisable--Ed Lybeck knows the district, and he's worked for me for so many years--to have him continue to run the campaign as campaign manager."

So I said, "Well, I'd like to meet him, talk with him." I thought he was rather a cold man. I came to be very, very fond of him, and his wife. I loved Ruth Lybeck very much. But he was very quiet and very abrupt.

One of the first meetings I had was down on Skid Row. It had been arranged by Phil Connelly. I didn't know this. He tried to arrange meetings which he was sure I would refuse, that would throw me off base. This was the second meeting. (I'll tell you about the first in a minute, but I'm going to finish with the second one first.) It was on a Sunday when the men came into this house that was kind of--I don't know what you'd call it, a cross between the Salvation Army and a gathering of lonely men. No women. All men. Ed Lybeck talked to me about it. He said, "Now, Helen. You're going to talk to Skid Row men. There's only one thing they're interested in, pensions." You remember the Townsend Plan?

Fry: Oh, yes.

Douglas: He said, "That's all they're interested in." I said, "But I'm not for the Townsend Plan. He said, "Well, I'm just telling you that is all they're interested in." This was on our way downtown. And I said, "All right. Thank you for telling me."

I talked for an hour, and I talked about the TVA. [laughing] And I tied it in. I said, "You want a secure old age, but you can't have it unless certain programs are undertaken. And I want to explain to you a program that you may not know about." So, I told them about the TVA. I described it to them, told them about the dams, the difference it made for the people in the South. And I told them then I was for any program of security that the federal government would support.

Going home, Lybeck didn't say a solitary word. When we reached my house, which took about three quarters of an hour, he drove up the driveway, and I got out. Then he spoke, "Well, you're different." [laughter] "I think maybe your way will go too." And I never, never did what I think is shortchanging a voter's capacity to cope

Douglas: with problems by always narrowly addressing a given group on their particular preoccupation. I'm not saying you don't have to answer where you stand on all issues absolutely, if you're for it or against it. But I think you have to present a wider aspect of the entire national program.

Fry: You were a teacher.

Douglas: I think campaigning is a period of education; campaigning should be beneficial for everyone, candidate and voter. Beneficial for the candidate to hear from the people, beneficial for the voters to learn facts, on problems that are common to everyone and that have to be solved.

So that was one issue, and one speech that began my first campaign. The other was the very first meeting. I was invited (and Phil Connelly was in back of this one, we found out later) to give a speech, again down in that Skid Row area at night. Evelyn Chavoor, who later became head of my office) went with me. We sort of realized where we were going as we went into the dark part of the city, but when we drew up in front of the place I said, "This can't be it, it's a bar!" Evelyn said, "Yes, it's a bar, that's what it is. You stay here and I'm going inside to find out if this is really where they want you to speak." And we'd gone alone, remember!

And so she went inside and came out and looked at me skeptically and said, "This is where your meeting is. Are you going in?" We went inside and, of course, there were some men that had been imbibing rather heavily. There was one man (probably put up to it) who kept interrupting as I kept talking. [laughter] One of my educational speeches! And finally I banged the bar (I was standing against the bar) and I said, "Will you keep still or get out! Just keep still a minute!" And he was finally quiet. After that, they didn't try to arrange any more strange meetings for me. They saw I was willing to go anywhere.

As a result of that meeting there were three young ex-service-men who called themselves "The Three Musketeers." They lived in that area. I never again went at night to a certain part of the downtown city that those three men would follow by car, having learned ahead of time from headquarters where I was going to be. They would meet me with a car and stay with me until I went out of the district later that night.

Fry: Did they reconnoiter for you?

Douglas: No, no, nothing to do with me. They had nothing to do with the campaign. They took this protection job on themselves. They wanted to make sure nothing happened to me in the area. We frightened

Douglas: them. Two women alone in the dark part of the city at night, you know. Meetings, would usually begin at eight o'clock and finish at ten. I was going into areas that Tom Ford probably never went into. I just went where anybody really said they wanted to hear me speak. And sometimes it wasn't that they really wanted me to speak; it was a trumped up invitation, designed to frighten me.

Fry: Something that Connelly had set up?

Douglas: Something that Connelly had set up. I don't know how many of these meetings he was in back of, but he certainly opposed me in that first campaign, no question about it, all the way through.

Fry: Was sexism a problem to him?

Douglas: No, no. Right from the beginning he knew I was strong-minded and I could not be controlled. I thought for myself, and he didn't want that. He just didn't want that.

Fry: Were you ever disturbed by changing the subject from a real issue? I noticed this happened a few times in the press--where there seemed to be a number of very hot issues in the campaign, but a story would come out on your beauty, like this business later about you and Margaret Chase Smith.

Douglas: No, it was Clare Boothe Luce, Clare Luce, yes. You'll find some clippings from the national press on that in the Oklahoma University Library Archives among my papers. Before I came to Washington, the press, taking the lighter side of politics, tried to work out a feud between Clare and me. [laughter]

The women of the press always give a dinner at the beginning of each session for the new women members of Congress as well as the old members. As a first-term congresswoman, I was at such a dinner and Clare was there as an older member. She came to Congress one term before I did. I was asked to speak first, as I remember.

So, as part of my speech, I said, "I didn't come here to feud with Clare Boothe Luce or anybody else. I came here--my husband is overseas. He's in a war, we're in a war. It's very serious; I'm very serious. I didn't come here for some frivolous reason!"

She leaned across the table and said, "I agree with you. We will never feud." And we never did! But, the press tried to work up something. It was very boring.

You know, it was boring and painful when I went into the theater and they talked about how beautiful I was. There was a competition on at the time of the opening of my first play, Dreams for Sale, as

Douglas: to who were the ten most beautiful women in America. Heywood Broun wrote in his review of the play, the morning after it opened, something like this: "Let's stop the competition. Helen Gahagan is the ten most beautiful women in America."

That notice made me very unhappy. It distressed me. I wanted people to talk only about my acting! What had my looks to do with acting? As a result, I deliberately used very little make-up and dressed my hair in the plainest fashion.

After I had been in the theater for about two years, Mother, my brother Walter, and I went to Europe for a few months. We were in Florence, Italy part of the time. One day I was visiting in one of the palaces, sitting in one of the large rooms drinking in the paintings lining the walls. Suddenly Stark Young, a highly respected theater critic, was standing in front of me.

"Helen," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Young, how are you?"

"Helen, you know, you've got to stop this business of trying to make yourself look plain. You must use your beauty just the way you use your voice, your body, your mind in acting. One uses everything in the theater. Beauty is a part of the theater. Now look at those pictures."

And then and there he gave me a long lecture using the pictures to illustrate what he was saying. He asked me to look at the figures in the pictures, asked me what pleased me about the pictures, asked me if it was not their beauty that first caught my eye. He called my attention to the movement of their forms, the drapery of their clothes, the way the folds of the material fell. And then he ended with, "You are a fine actress. Be grateful that you have beauty, too."

I never forgot his advice. It was very helpful to me. How carefully I planned my clothes and make-up from that time on.

Setting up Home and Office in Washington

Fry: You said when you undertook your first campaign that this was war-time and you didn't have a housekeeper or any staff at home, and you had two small children and that large home.

Douglas: I still had the gardener. I had with me Melvyn's brother and his wife and their two children, and Melvyn's mother.

Fry: And any children of yours at home?

Douglas: Yes, my little girl and our boy.

Fry: I don't see how you did it, Helen. I guess that's what my question is. [laughter]

Douglas: Everybody did something they hadn't done before. [tape off] The worst time--the most difficult actually--the hardest time for me was in Washington. Our little girl, Mary Helen, was five years old when we went to Washington. Her brother, Peter Gahagan, was ten. It was hard for them--it was distressing for me after my upbringing to think of their coming home and my not being there.

Fry: Yes, after your close family.

Douglas: Yes. Mary Helen called the Congress first when she was only five years old. She was intelligent enough to say to the operator, "Please give me the Congress, where my mother is." [laughter] So, they gave her the Congress. She said, "I want the Roosevelt side of the House." She must have gotten the House of Representatives--anyway, they found me. The one thing I was certain that she said, because the operator told me, was that she wanted the Roosevelt side, that she wanted her mother, Mrs. Douglas.

When a page came to where I was sitting and informed me that I was wanted on the phone, I had no idea that I would hear her little voice at the end of the line asking, "Mommy, when are you coming home?"

Yes, it was difficult--very difficult.

We lived in Chevy Chase. The children went to a school a block from where we lived. Evelyn Chavoor, the young woman who was head of my office, lived with us. By the way, her history is worth recording.

Evelyn came to us first as a very young girl during her college years, after classes. After Mary Helen was born, I asked her please to come to us for a year to take care of the new baby, which she did. On leaving us, she took examinations for civil service in the federal government. Her rating was very high. She went to Washington to work for the Treasury Department.

After a time, she returned to California to work in the Office of Defense Transportation.

When I ran for Congress, she arrived at the house and said, "I'm going to be working for you."

Douglas: And I said, "Evelyn, you can't work for me. It's impossible. You can't work for me in the campaign. I don't have money to pay you."

She said, "I'm not talking about paying. There's nothing you can do about it. I've given up my job. I'm coming to work for you."

Things like that in the campaign were very touching. There was a woman, Alma Herman, a cateress for parties. I met her first at Herbert Marshall's house, the actor Marshall. In the 1950 finals she called Evelyn one day and said, "I'm on my way downtown to a job, and I have something for you."

Evelyn met her on a street corner, and Alma gave her an envelope, saying, "I want you to give this to Mrs. Douglas."

Evelyn asked, "What is it?"

Alma said, "It's my contribution to the campaign."

And Evelyn expostulated, "Oh, Alma, you mustn't do it! Now please don't! You work too hard for your money." Then she opened the envelope and saw a thousand dollar check!

Fry: Holy mackerel!

Douglas: Alma said, "You have no right to tell me what I can do and what I cannot do. I want to give this money to Mrs. Douglas!"

I had many such experiences like that. Alma made her money night after night, catering for parties, as she had for Herbert Marshall, for us, all those rich, nice people, which is a grueling kind of work.

I'll tell you one story, and then we'll finish and go to lunch. You'll love this story.

Evelyn went to Washington with me. (She's had a most distinguished career in Washington. She ought to give you some facts about her career when you see her because it's really fascinating.)

She was in my Washington office as one of the secretaries. I had hired, on the recommendation of Congressman Emmanuel Celler, a highfalutin woman to be the head of the office. And I didn't know--I'd never heard--that you had to have someone who had had experience in organizing congressional files. Those files. Right off, our office was in a turmoil, with mail coming into the office, not just from our district, but from every part of the state. Because I had been national committeewoman and state vice-chairman, people knew me.

Douglas: If their own congressman didn't answer their letters within twenty-four hours, they sent letters to me telling me, "I received no answer from my congressman. Will you do something?"

A few months after we had been in Washington, Evelyn came to me and said, "I hate to tell you, Helen, but the woman heading your office after only these few months has the files in such a state that we will never be able to find a thing. This is a real idiot that's head of your office!"

I said, "Well, all right! It's very simple. We'll get rid of her!"

"You can't get rid of her," she said. "That's why I'm so upset! How are you going to get rid of her?"

"Just get rid of her, Evelyn, that's all there is to it! If I have to pay her salary, I'll have to pay it from my own pocket and whatever severance pay is due. Whatever I have to pay her, I will pay. We're not going to have her here if she's no good, ruining the office. Thank you for telling me."

She asked, "You think you can do that? Who's going to take her place?"

"You are!" I said.

"I can't take the job. I'm not qualified to head the office staff!" Evelyn said.

"Yes you are, yes you are! And you're going to take it!"

She took the job.

One or two months after that, on a Sunday night, Evelyn came home to the house in Chevy Chase after working all day in the congressional office. She came to me in my room. I had already gone to bed. She looked dead beat.

I had been working all day at the house preparing a statement for the next day in defense of the Reclamation Act, which was coming up in the House. When Evelyn walked into the room, I had just been talking on the phone to Arthur E. Goldschmidt of the Interior Department. I had met him through Dr. Paul Taylor, before coming to Washington. He and his wife became very close friends of mine.

Arthur Goldschmidt was the last ambassadorial appointment Lyndon Johnson made to the United Nations. His wife, Elizabeth Wickenden, is well known on the Hill. She is an authority on public welfare

Douglas: and has advised those in Congress who worked in this field. She knows more about the social security bill and what should be done to improve it than most other specialists. She was an adviser to Lyndon Johnson, and today to Ted Kennedy. She was my adviser. She wrote the bill I introduced on the problems of the aging. She's one of my close, close friends.

Well, as I say, I had been talking on the phone to Tex Goldschmidt. We were discussing an amendment that was going to be proposed the next day to the Reclamation Act. It would have greatly weakened that provision of the act that limited ownership to 160 acres on all publicly irrigated land. I had been asking Tex for certain information that I needed in preparation for my opposition to the amendment.

I had just put down the phone when Evelyn walked into my room. It was after eight o'clock. She looked as though she had been dragged in back of a team of horses.

"What's the matter with you?" I said. "What are you looking so gloomy about?"

She came over to the bed, and after a few moments she said, "I'm a failure. I just can't get the files straightened out!"

"Well," I said, "you haven't given yourself a chance, have you? If that idiot had everything in such a mess, give yourself time to straighten it out, for heaven's sake!"

Evelyn was keeping the day-to-day office files up-to-date, even though there was a heavy daily mail. It was the past files that were still in a mess. Evelyn was a perfectionist.

I repeated, "You haven't given yourself much of a chance!"

"No, no, I can't! I'm terribly sorry, Helen, but I'm not up to it. I'm going to find someone for you. I'll bring a number of people in for you to interview. I've got to go."

"Evelyn, you have not given yourself a chance! You cannot leave! And remember, you can always commit suicide! [laughter]

She said, "What!"

I said, "Well, if you can't face life, there is always an out. You're saying at this moment you can't face what's ahead of you. If you can't face what's ahead of you, you can always get out. There's no obligation for you to go on working. If you just can't. Remember, you can always stop the show! You can always stop it. But, you haven't given yourself a chance!"

Douglas: She looked at me, appalled--appalled! Finally she laughed, "All right, I'll stay."

She stayed. The files were corrected, finally put in proper order. I was carrying a heavy load of work and constantly needed filed material. There never was any wait. Anything I asked for was on my desk in a few seconds because of Evelyn's remarkable organizational ability.

After the 1950 Senate defeat, she remained in Washington. She has had a most distinguished career; let me give you a quick rundown of the responsible positions Evelyn has held since 1951.

She went from my office directly to Abe Fortas's law office for a few months. She walked out of a congressional office into his office. He knew how close she had been to me--how she worked. Abe Fortas's law office filled a temporary gap.

After that, she was legislative assistant to Senator Blair Moody of Michigan, who was defeated in the 1952 election. From there, she went to the Democratic National Committee as assistant to the Director of the Research Division. Evelyn left the National Committee and returned to Los Angeles for family reasons and was for the first few months there, assistant to Roz Wyman, the Los Angeles city council-woman.

When Richard Graves ran for governor in California, he persuaded her to be the coordinator of the Graves campaign in Southern California. At the end of that campaign, she returned to Washington, D.C. as assistant to the Democratic National Chairman, Paul Butler. She was the first woman to hold this position.

At the end of Paul Butler's chairmanship, she came to New York as office manager for the Gahagan Dredging Corporation. After the death of her father, it again became necessary for Evelyn to return to Los Angeles to be with her mother, and this time she went with the Wyman, Bautzer, Finell and Rothman law firm as office manager,

When it was no longer necessary for Evelyn to remain in Los Angeles, she returned to Washington, D.C. to become personnel manager as well as interim office manager when necessary in the law firm of Covington and Burling.

Evelyn Chavoor really was and is remarkable, remarkable. The only way I could have accomplished as much work as I did accomplish was because my office was perfectly run. Well, I can tell you many stories about Evelyn, all interesting. Now, shall we stop and go to luncheon? [tape off during break for lunch]

Fry: Can you give us some idea of your physical surroundings; how you got your office, and--

Douglas: Well, you are assigned an office when you go in as a freshman; you don't have much of a choice. After you are there a long time, someone like Lyndon Johnson, for instance, might have more than one office. Senior members have first choice, in any case. Of course, the old members aren't going to move to suit the new members. There are a limited number of free, empty offices. You have some choice, but not very much.

As for office organization, it is very important to establish a harmoniously working group in the office. If the secretaries like and trust one another, they are better able to do their work. No one should be allowed to ride on the back of someone else. When I came to Congress, I brought with me Evelyn Chavoor, as I said. I could never have gotten through the amount of work that I did without her, and the other women in my office.

Then, I had some very special people come into my office as volunteers. Charles Hogan, for instance, a California friend. He had been with the Meiklejohn School in San Francisco for adult education before the war. In the war, Hogan was attached to the U.S. embassy in London under Ambassador James Winant. He was Chief of the Recruitment and Manning Organization for the European Theater of Operations, in the U.S. War Shipping Administration.

After the war, he came to Washington. He didn't know exactly what he wanted to do, though he was sure that he wanted to work in the United Nations in some capacity. He wasn't ready to take a job, but didn't want to be idle, and so he came to us, and offered his service for a few months saying, "Helen, have you work in your office for me?"

"Yes, I have, as a volunteer!"

He stayed with us for a few months. I was very grateful for his help.

Then there was my cousin, Walter Pick. He, too, came into my office as a volunteer, after the war ended in Europe. He had been Melvyn's and my secretary in California before the war. After the war, he came to Washington to see me before returning to California. He, too, was a valued assistant.

Then, of course, we had a number of college students who came to us in the summer months at the beginning of the internship program which is still very popular with students.

Fry: Was it hard to make use of them?

Douglas: No, they fitted into the office very easily. We used to try to educate them. We would send them up into the galleries, either House or Senate, on certain days when debate was going to be interesting and give them some direction as to what they should be looking for. But, that was all in addition to daily tasks.

On the other hand, Dr. Charles Hogan, who was so highly trained and experienced, would take over some special project I was working on, thus making it unnecessary to hire someone from outside to research a projected job. Remember, we didn't receive very much money in those days.

If one of the children needed an operation, or if I wanted to give a major address in the House on the cost of living, the Negro soldier, housing, the United Nations, I would have to give a lecture somewhere to earn the money to pay for specialized research assistance. The representatives during the war and the postwar period received a salary of \$12,000. I have forgotten what we were given for staff, but it wasn't very much. It wasn't ever enough.

If I accepted a lecture, to get the money needed for my office or the children, I would begin working early in the morning--four o'clock in the morning! This was the quietest time for me to work. It also meant that I would be in my office by 9:00 a.m. Anytime I gave a major address in the House, I worked on it in the early morning hours.

Since Evelyn Chavoor lived with me, she too very often worked with me at 4:00 a.m. Yes, she had that to do also. I don't think her salary was enough. Nothing would have been enough. You never can pay enough for good work. Good work can't be paid for. Cannot be paid for in any way, shape or form, and salaries were low then compared with what they get today, gracious!

And how careful we were about everything: stamps, for instance. No letter to a constituent ever went out without a stamp; if it in any way could be construed as personal, it never went out by the congressional mail frank. Never.

You want to know how the office worked. Legislation, there would be a calendar on legislation. I would read the bills. The ones which dealt with matters I wasn't conversant with, needed my immediate study and some research to ascertain all possible facts, before I could begin to decide how I ought to vote.

Douglas: Before I could draft a letter (usually at night) in answer to questions about bills, I had to read the bills. The amount of mail fluctuated depending upon bills under consideration in the House of Representatives. After I drafted a letter in answer to inquiries on a given bill, Evelyn took over. At the end of the day's session and the end of the work in the office, I would sign the letters. There might be hundreds of them.

If letters demanded more than just an explanation of a bill, or how I expected to vote on a bill (it was not always possible to say in advance how one was going to vote on a bill), I would take those letters home with me and draft a special answer to each letter. Every evening, and that could be anywhere from seven to nine o'clock, there would be many such letters, fifteen to thirty of them--all needing special answers.

Requests came in every week asking me to speak somewhere. Evelyn Chavoor could take care of such mail automatically if she knew I had no intention of leaving Washington.

Every morning she would come into my office with her pad. She would have to have maybe an hour with me alone before the working day began. If we knew we were going to have a very heavy work day ahead of us, we rose around six o'clock and worked from seven to eight before going to the office. She would always begin by saying, "Let's go over this; give me directions for the day on these matters in the office. And then the day went smoothly--it just went.

In the six years that I served my district in the House of Representatives, in addition to the daily work and study required of me as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, I undertook a number of special projects necessitating considerable research and additional study. The purpose of these projects was to bring to the House the results of study in the hope that my address would have beneficial results. For example, I made my Market Basket Speech at the end of the war to save rent control.

The night before I addressed the House (it always seemed to be the night before), meant all-night work for the office staff. You see, just page-wise it was a big, thick speech, with page after page of figures. We had to be very careful, of course, that in copying my draft and inserting any number of charts, there was no mistake.

That night I worked in my private office. In the outer office, the secretaries were typing, Miss Chavoor carried pages from me to them and the finished work back to me for final checking. In the outer office there was also Lucy Kramer, an economist whose assistance I often required in gathering the factual material. I needed her to present my case for the retention of rent control. At the end of the

Douglas: war, you see, price controls on food were removed with disastrous results to the housewife's budget. I wanted to save rent control if I possibly could. I was fearful that if it was removed, families would be in double jeopardy. Well, this was my thinking and my concern. For the office, it meant hours of additional, mechanical labor.

You may well ask why did it take all night, and it did, to copy the final draft of the speech I was to make the next day in the House of Representatives. Well, Lucy Kramer was a kind of "road block." I had worked the figures she had collected for me into percentages, a "third" of something or a "fourth increase"--you know, instead of using the original figures because percentages could be more easily grasped. Well, Lucy would not allow the final typing to be done until she had worked the percentages back into figures and then back again into percentages. This took considerable time. Remember, there were no machines then to help. Lucy made sure there would be no mistakes, and I supported the delays this necessitated. When the pages were finally typed, Lucy and Evelyn Chavoor would check, line by line, to make sure that the secretaries made no errors. So you see, one of my special projects meant many, many more hours beyond the normal day-to-day work.

Since the Foreign Affairs Committee handled such important matters during the war and the postwar period, I made daily requirements of the secretarial staff in addition to routine matters. I wrote many memos and reports to keep up with the rapid changes taking place in the war and postwar period.

Fry: Did you read any of the current news magazines, or what did you do to keep yourself informed?

Douglas: Well, for every one of the bills that came before the House of Representatives--let me give you an illustration, in housing, for example. I first had to get through government material, material supplied by the housing administration. Now and then, I found time to read magazines, but mostly it was government reports. There was, of course, opposition material. Remember, every bill that goes to the House of Representatives carries with it a report synthesizing a committee's hearings. I studied them very carefully. If the report of the hearings raised questions, I sought the answers before I was prepared to vote.

On complicated important bills, the Rules Committee may allow three or four days, or a week, for discussion and voting by the members of the House. Some bills would only be given one day--the less important bills. Of course all bills are important, but some are less complicated than others.

Fry: What about background commentaries on the general issues of the day as one would pick up in something like The Nation or the New Republic? Did you have time to have what we would call today "input" on things written outside government?

Douglas: Some, sometimes, yes, but not much, not much. Mostly I read research material. For example, to begin to realize the age in which we live today, I read and studied articles written by scientists in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists published by the Educational Foundation for Nuclear Science. It was founded in 1945 by Hyman H. Goldsmith, Albert Einstein, and Eugene Rabinowitch to help laypeople understand the nuclear age. In trying to grasp the national needs for housing after the war, I turned to the findings and reports of housing experts in order to form my own opinion.

In answer to your question, did I read the New Republic and The Nation, let us say that I glanced at them. To do more was a waste of time as they were reporting, week by week, what we were doing in the Congress. I read the New Republic today. It is a good magazine and it tells me what is going on in the Congress. I enjoy reading it. I didn't need to read it when I was in Congress, you see; I knew what was going on.

Let me give you another example. For instance, if a labor bill is on the congressional calendar, I might talk to someone I trusted on the Labor Committee or to someone I trusted in one of the labor unions. If a vote on reclamation was coming to the House, I always turned to [the Bureau of] Reclamation in the Department of the Interior. Housing, to Wright Patman, Chairman of the Banking and Currency Committee. In other words, I sought out that member on the committee handling the bill I thought to be most knowledgeable. I tried to get the plus and minuses, the pros and cons. Oh yes, I almost forgot, on reclamation I always heard from California; without fail from Dr. Paul Taylor, whom I greatly respected for his knowledge and vision.

Many books were written during the war and the postwar period that related to matters coming before the Congress. I didn't have the time to read them except for certain authors whose opinions I greatly respected. I did try to read those books. While I served in Congress, I wasn't able to read loosely--that is, everything I read had to help prepare me for the proper vote. If I knew someone whom I respected very greatly had written an article in a newspaper or magazine, then of course, I would read it.

But because of my heavy schedule, I didn't say, "What will I read tonight?" I read in a directed way always, in search of certain information. There was always a pile of stuff that I couldn't get through. There wasn't time.

- Fry: I want to get down on the record here your reaction to this news story that came out in December of '44, before you officially took office, that says that "unity among the sixteen Democratic California House members is imperiled" and those four new ones, "Helen Gahagan Douglas, Ellis Patterson, Clyde G. Doyle, and Ned R. Healy, will demand more attention from House leadership for better committee assignments." Voorhis, George Outland and Chet Holifield probably would support the newcomers, they thought.
- Douglas: Voorhis was a very close friend of mine and Melvyn's. Chet Holifield I helped elect in 1942 when I was national committeewoman and state vice-chairman; it was through our efforts that he got to Congress. Who is the third one?
- Fry: George Outland.
- Douglas: George Outland--I helped elect him, in 1942. Chet Holifield is my close friend. Chet Holifield had been the head of Voorhis's office here in California. He ran for Congress in 1942 and was elected.
- Fry: When I talked to--who is your friend in Santa Barbara?--Harry Girvetz, he suspected that you had helped to educate George Outland; he said Outland came from a conservative background.
- Douglas: That is right. I have forgotten how that worked now. This is a long time ago that we are talking about. But I was chairman of my congressional class or president of my class, that was of those elected in '44 to the House of Representatives.
- Fry: The whole freshman class of the House?
- Douglas: That is right, and I have forgotten how that worked, how I happened to be that. Well, he--
- Fry: Outland later became a leader of sort of a liberal clique, or at least an important member of it. At any rate, you are credited with educating him.
- Douglas: His office was right next to mine, as a matter of fact.
- Fry: That was a strategic position. Were there any particular issues that you discussed?
- Douglas: Not that I remember. We voted very much the same, except--I have forgotten whether the tidelands bill came up while he was there. If it did, he voted differently than I did. He voted along with all the other members of the California delegation. I was the only member to support President Truman and the Supreme Court on the issue of the tidelands.

- Fry: Well, this slight insurgency that we are talking about: in the newspaper it said that there was a move to replace Clarence Lea of Santa Rosa as chairman of the delegation, in order to liberalize it. Is that right?
- Douglas: Lea was the oldest member of the entire California delegation. Yes--I think so. Tom Ford was the oldest member of the delegation in the southern half of California; Lea the oldest member north and south; he had been in Congress one term longer than Tom. Tom was a liberal, the same as I.
- Fry: I had always thought that when you went to Congress as a freshman, your first committee assignments were just almost nothing, very insignificant.
- Douglas: They often are. It depends. I was very fortunate to be given a place on the Foreign Affairs Committee. I think Rayburn had a lot to do with it, and as I told you--
- Fry: Oh, it was Rayburn?
- Douglas: Oh yes, sure. Sure.
- Fry: Was he supporting you?
- Douglas: No. Sam Rayburn was a Texan, but we always got along very well. He was a supporter of Roosevelt. Very close friend of Lyndon's, or rather, Lyndon was a very close friend of his. Whichever way I put it, Lyndon stayed very close to him; Sam Rayburn was his mentor.
- I had done a lot of work as national committeewoman and state vice-chairman. I didn't go to Congress as an unknown. The congressional leaders knew what I had done to support the president on foreign affairs. And certainly Tom Ford, before he left, must have been very helpful in my receiving the Foreign Affairs Committee assignment.
- I am sure Tom Ford prepared the way for my receiving the Foreign Affairs assignment. He knew so well the work I had done between 1940 and 1944 in building support of Franklin Roosevelt's foreign policy. The state Democratic committee for four years under my direction carried out an educational program in support of our foreign policy. We had a speakers bureau that covered every county in the state. My work was appreciated in Washington. I also campaigned nationally for President Roosevelt.
- Fry: As a presidential supporter--

Douglas: Yes, not only in support of foreign policy, but in support of the administration's domestic program as well. The work the women's division was doing in education was known and admired. Jerry Voorhis knew what we were doing. In fact, every member of the delegation was well aware of what the women's division program was. Jerry was very respected in the House, perhaps more important than any other member of the delegation at that time. He may have had something to do with my receiving the Foreign Affairs assignment.

Fry: You don't know anything more about whatever skullduggery went on behind the scenes, do you?

Douglas: No, no, no. I just know I wanted that committee. The chairman of the Ways and Means Committee asked me what I would like and I said Foreign Affairs Committee, and suddenly someone on the committee came to me and said, "You have the Foreign Affairs Committee." And that was it. I did no lobbying for it or pressuring of any kind. I was given a place on the Foreign Affairs Committee because of my work, before I went to Congress, on international matters.

Fry: Such as--

Douglas: My work from '40 to '44 in support of the administration's foreign policy. And before that, Melvyn was very active in the William Allen White Committee and the Fight for Freedom Committee. I was a member of the Fight for Freedom Committee, too. We were both Roosevelt Democrats. We supported everything Roosevelt stood for and wanted to accomplish. We were apprehensive of what was happening in Europe even before Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia and Austria. The direction of my interests in music and the theater were all changed because of what was happening in the world. This was generally known.

I had cancelled my contract with the Vienna Opera because I was absolutely convinced that Hitler was going to take us to war. So there was a background of interest, and activity in support of our foreign policy, and a correct reading of events. Therefore I was appointed to the Foreign Affairs Committee. Foreign policy was my day-to-day concern.

Stands Taken in Congress: Domestic

Postwar Price Controls

Douglas: In addition to that I had a continuing interest in domestic programs, which I call "housekeeping" needs of the country. Before I went to Congress I had studied very carefully programs having to do with housing and agriculture and minority groups. I worked as one of the Roosevelt appointees on the WPA national advisory committee and visited WPA projects around the country. I worked with the Farm Security [Administration] regional administration under Laurence Hewes. I not only visited Farm Security Camps in California; I visited migrants living on ditch banks.

In Congress, in addition to my day-to-day work on the Foreign Affairs Committee, I had other vital interests. I made some notes here. They are not in sequence, but you can refer to them as we go along. For instance, to get back to the Market Basket Speech and my efforts to retain price controls at the end of the war.

At the end of the war, price controls on food were discontinued. I opposed that and supported Chester Bowles in opposing it. During the year in which controls had been taken off, prices rose alarmingly, and then there was an effort in Congress to remove controls on rent. I was very apprehensive as to what that would do to the family budget if controls were also removed on rent. I feared that rents would be greatly increased and that people would be in serious trouble. At the end of the war there was such a need for goods of every kind, and pressure was so great that unless there were controls, inevitably we would have inflation.

I argued the matter on the floor and saw that I was going to get nowhere, so I began a study. I hired an economist, Lucy Kramer, to gather for me the figures on exactly what had happened around the country. We got the Labor Department figures and other governmental figures in addition to our own investigation around the country.

Fry: This was after the Office of Price Administration was dead, right?

Douglas: This was after the controls on food had been removed. There were still controls on rent.

When the material was all together, I studied it and then worked it into a presentation. Charts were made to show graphically what was happening. And then I realized after I had asked for time

Douglas: to address the House and present my findings proving what the removal of controls on food had done to prices and the budget of the housewife, that the press might not carry my remarks. You know, it wasn't dramatic. All my material had to do with figures. I had to read figures and how does one make figures come alive?

Then I remembered Fiorello LaGuardia. He was serving in the Congress at the end of World War I. He, too, was concerned about rising prices. In order to impress the members of the House with the rising cost of food, to dramatize what he was saying--and he was always a dramatist--he came into the House Chamber with a lamb chop which he waved in the air to illustrate his remarks. He, too, was trying to save controls.

I worked out a plan that I thought would be productive, gain some attention, and also make the Republicans listen. I called the press gallery and talked to a number of the men and women and asked them if it would upset their budgets if their rent were increased, maybe doubled. They said it would be disastrous for their budgets. So I said, "Well, I am going shopping tomorrow morning. Will you come with me?"

The next morning I went shopping accompanied by about sixty press men and women. We went to a market within the shadow of the Capitol. I carried with me figures of what that market had been selling food for a year before. I bought the same foods. The shock was dramatic. Evident. Inescapable.

Fry: This period you are talking about--wholesale prices had jumped 31% in ten months, according to Barck and Blake.*

Douglas: Yes, yes, yes.

I had asked permission to address the House that day for an hour, or an hour and a half. I have forgotten which. The press was worried because the work in the House dragged on until very late. They kept sending down messengers--"You are going to address the House, aren't you? You are going to bring in your charts, aren't you?" And I said yes, but I brought in more than the charts.

I brought in great charts that were put up on stands. And then I brought in a market basket of food. And I had a table brought in. Butter and lard and milk and potatoes and eggs and so forth, coffee, and I put out everything from the basket on the table.

*Barck, Oscar Theodore and Blake, Nelson M., Since 1900 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1952), p.749.

Douglas: I think it was Everett Dirksen (it is easy enough to check if it is of any importance) who was assigned to take me on because the word had gotten around of what I was up to. Republicans wanted all controls of rent removed, with, I regret to say, some Democrats who also wanted to remove rent controls. (It wasn't just one side of the House.) But there were still enough of us to save rent control at that time.

My figures were irrefutable. Republicans had been maintaining in the House that food prices had not risen, so I collected national figures to prove that prices had risen. It took time but it was simple.

I maintained that if we removed the controls on rent, rents would also go up. I didn't think we should do that at that time. It would be too great a hardship on people throughout the country. So that was the market basket contribution that I made, and I think it was of some importance, because it did save controls on rent.

This didn't have to do directly with my work on the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Fry: Did you get into a debate with Dirksen on the floor?

Douglas: Oh, yes. And then there was another time that I think Dirksen and I tangled. The Republicans decided to attack the housing program by attacking Wilson W. Wyatt, head of Housing. One day, at the end of the session there was a concerted attack. I looked around the floor of the House to see if there were any members of the Banking and Currency Committee present. There were, but no one rose to defend Wyatt. I went to a number of members seated on the floor of the House and asked, "Aren't you going to answer that, aren't you going to answer that?" It was a bitter attack on Wyatt, really ugly and not warranted at all. And they said, "No, no, we haven't the time, we have too much work."

I went down to my office and set about getting from the Housing Administration the facts needed to answer the wild attack that had been made on Wilson Wyatt. When I had the material, I stayed up late that night. The next morning I got up at 4:00 a.m., for that was when I liked to do my writing. That day I asked permission of the Speaker to address the House for an hour or an hour and a half in answer to the attack on Wilson Wyatt. Again there were those assigned by the Republican leadership to answer my remarks, or rather, question my remarks. A heated debate ensued. It went on for a long time. But I won the debate, for I had the needed figures, the needed facts. The Republicans were blowing hot air.

Fry: This was on the issue of low-cost housing?

Douglas: This was the issue of Wyatt, the head of the National Housing Agency.

Other Postwar Readjustment Measures

Fry: The housing bills were up at a time when housing was very, very difficult for the veterans or anyone to find a decent place to live, and there was a lumber shortage too. So, I wanted to ask you about that housing bill and how it finally did loosen up then.

Douglas: What year was that, because after the war every session we had a housing bill and usually the housing bill came up for a vote the last night the House was in session. As a result, we would be there most of the night.

Fry: It was '47, I think.

Douglas: In 1948 the Wolcott No-Housing bill passed. We called it the No-Housing bill because there were no provisions for public housing, slum clearance, or urban development. I voted against it. It passed with a vote of 319 against 90. The same year a month before, I had placed a petition on the House Speaker's desk to discharge from the Republican-controlled House Banking and Currency Committee the Wagner-Ellender-Taft housing bill. I was able to obtain 121 Representatives' signatures on that petition. But not enough signatures to force the bill out of committee and bring it to the floor for a vote. In 1949 when the Congress was again under Democratic control, the Wagner-Ellender-Taft was voted out of the Banking and Currency Committee and passed by the Congress in the House and the Senate.

In 1949, there was another housing bill titled Federal Aid and Slum Clearance. This was the National Housing Act of 1949. It provided badly needed legislation for public housing, slum clearance, and research on the nation's housing needs. It passed the House; 228 members voting for the bill, 185 voting against it.

In 1950, a middle-income housing bill passed, titled the Housing Act of 1950. It provided government assistance to middle-income groups. Three hundred sixty-one members voted in favor of the bill and only ten opposed it.

Fry: There was the Wright Patman housing bill that provided, according to my notes, for 1,200,000 homes in 1946--

Douglas: Yes, I know. It came out of the Banking and Currency Committee. Patman was chairman of the Banking and Currency Committee. And it also had, I think, an interesting provision in it for a lot of prefabricated homes that were guaranteed a government market. I wonder how many prefabricated homes there are in California today? In 1950 I visited some prefabricating factories.

I was amazed this week at the number of mobile homes that there are between Carmel and San Francisco. We drove up the inland route yesterday, and saw one after another. I was wondering why people preferred them to the prefabricated houses. I suppose it has to do with taxes, taxes on home ownership. Mobile homes are terribly ugly! And I would think mobile homes are very uncomfortable.

Fry: Also, I think, a part of this bill was to provide for mobile homes, almost anything that anybody could live in. Helen, was this also to provide for homes that were built by the government or subsidized by the government?

Douglas: I would have to have the bill in front of me. I would think there must have been some public housing in it. And then there were loans. It was a program that provided for loans to people at low interest rates to build their own homes. In fact, we have had that program through the years. It is only these last years that it has been cut back drastically.

Fry: Was that what was hanging it up in the Banking and Currency Committee, do you know?

Douglas: I have forgotten now, what it was. There was always trouble with the housing bills.

Fry: Is that method of getting a petition signed in order to get a bill out of a committee when a committee itself wouldn't vote on it, is that something that is used frequently or is it used--

Douglas: It is used, but it is rather unusual. It is very difficult to get the required number of signatures you need.

Fry: It is scratching for each vote from everyone in the House.

Douglas: That is right.

Fry: In signing a petition like that, did you feel that whoever signed the petition would be likely to vote for the bill?

Douglas: That is right. And it keeps the issue before the House, too.

Fry: You petitioned "the discharge of the Wagner-Ellender-Taft housing bill."

Douglas: Yes, I was on the House committee organized to support that housing bill. When it finally passed, Senator Taft gave a dinner for those in the House and the Senate who had worked and shepherded the bill through both bodies. It was a very gay evening. Taft was in a very expansive mood. It was a dinner of celebration.

When the Wagner-Ellender-Taft housing bill came to the floor of the House in 1949, in stating my position on the bill I said [reads from the Congressional Record, June 24, 1949, p. 8501]:

"I am not going to make a long speech on the need for the housing program. The need for this legislation has been irrefutably presented by the members of the House Banking and Currency Committee. I think it is well known that I have urged the passage of this legislation ever since I came to Congress, and that I have worked and fought for its passage. Mr. Chairman, this is indeed a great day. It is the first time since I have been a member of this body that I can sit relaxed and thoroughly enjoy the discussions, knowing for certain that the bill before us (the Housing Act of 1949 with its important slum clearance provisions) will pass with a comfortable margin. Let us not forget that a decent home for every family in America has been for a long time a Democratic party goal. The father of slum clearance was Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

"Let us not be ashamed of the fact that the home is the foundation of democracy. Let us be proud of the fact that our party, in seeking the goal of a decent home for every family in America has stood with the churches, with the civic organizations, with all those who know their own community--who know how people live, not just in their section of the city, not just on their farm, but in their whole community.

"Let us be proud of the fact that we have been able to see the needs of the whole community... This legislation will pass. The majority of the members understand that this bill is socially desirable, economically sound, and politically desirable--politically desirable because good housing strengthens the roots of democracy."

Fry: Do you have anything to tell us about that full-employment battle, which became watered down as "maximum employment" when it was--

Douglas: Well, it was just a continuing battle in the House, long weeks of discussion among the members as well as in the Banking and Currency Committee, and of course, the great power behind it was Patman, Wright Patman. And again a special committee was organized to work to muster support for the bill in the House. A few years ago, I had a note from Wright Patman inviting me to attend a gathering

- Douglas: of those who had worked on that committee for the passage of the full-employment bill. I was sorry that I couldn't go to Washington to help celebrate.
- Fry: A sort of reunion, you mean?
- Douglas: A reunion, yes. I would think that is what it was.
- Fry: Well, maybe you could describe to us how you stood on this, because looking back on it from today, it seems like a terribly important issue that was at stake here: the role of government in business and its control of business and employment opportunities--
- Douglas: You are talking about the full-employment bill?
- Fry: Yes, the full-employment bill.
- Douglas: The stated policy in the introduction of the bill was all-important. The full-employment bill provided for a committee of economic experts to keep a president advised as to the economic health of the nation. In other words, the Congress decided that never again should the government be indifferent to conditions that threaten widespread unemployment. Government was never again going to wait passively inactive watching the development of serious economic stagnation. It was the policy that was so important. You should look up the policy statement in the full-employment act when you go to Oklahoma.
- Fry: Which statement is that?
- Douglas: The introduction to the bill has the statement of its objectives. In every bill there is a statement of policy introducing it. In Oklahoma you will find a copy of the bill in my papers. It was the practice of those on the committee supporting the full employment bill, as in the case of Wagner-Ellender-Taft housing bill, to introduce under their names the same bill.
- But the important part of the bill was not precisely whether it did this or that; it was the establishment of a new policy, namely that government must be concerned with national levels of employment, concerned with the well-being of people with respect to employment. Never again allow what had happened in '29, '30, '31 when millions were unemployed; when a third of the nation was unemployed.
- Relationships with Lobbyists
- Fry: The National Association of Manufacturers was quite against this. What sort of pressure did they bring to bear on people like you?

Douglas: Lobbying? I was not approached by the National Association of Manufacturers. You see, the National Association of Manufacturers did not contribute to my campaigns--I was supported by the "folks." Very few times did anyone try to bring threatening pressure to force me to vote a certain way.

Fry: People didn't come around to talk to you?

Douglas: Oh yes, of course. At the end of every day's session there was usually one or two or a group of people waiting for me in my outer office wanting to talk about some matter that was going to be considered by the Congress. It is the right of people to petition Congress, to inform Congress of conditions that intimately affect their lives.

But then there was an ugly kind of pressuring. I seldom was subjected to this. I will relate to you one such experience. Harry Bridges, head of the Longshoremen's Union, with a group of his men, were waiting for me in my office one evening. It was at the end of a long day's session in the House of Representatives. Miss Chavoor had put them in my private office. There were so many of them that it wasn't possible to leave them in the outer office, if the secretaries were to get on with their work. As I came down the hall to my office, one of the secretaries was standing at the door waiting for me.

She whispered, "Mrs. Douglas, we're sorry, we had to put some men in your office. There were so many of them, we couldn't work. They are great big men--they look awfully rough! We don't know who they are, but they insisted on seeing you."

Well, it seems that Harry Bridges and some of his longshoremen were making a tour of the offices of the California delegation. The headquarters of the Longshoremen's Union was in San Francisco. There was a bill or an amendment that Harry Bridges very much wanted to see pass. I was opposed to it. I remember that very well.

The secretaries had brought in chairs for some of the men--there were about fifteen in all. Harry Bridges seated himself in front of my desk directly opposite me. Harry Bridges did all the talking. He asked, or it's more exact to say he demanded, that I vote in support of the measure he wanted to see passed. I said that I hadn't really studied it, but from what I knew of it, I thought I probably would oppose it. To which Bridges replied, "In that case, the longshoremen will have to oppose you in the coming election." To which I replied with equal firmness, "That is your privilege, of course, you can oppose me if you choose to. That is beside the point, Mr. Bridges." At that, Mr. Bridges rose and his men with him and left. It was an ugly meeting--the atmosphere was charged with suppressed violence.

Douglas: The last man to leave the room hesitated at the door, turned and said, "Mrs. Douglas, we are sorry. Some of us knew it wouldn't do any good to see you in this way. We apologize for this interview."

Then there was another time when some representatives of the Railroad Brotherhood Union visited me in my office. They were lobbying in favor of a bill in which the railroads were interested. If I remember correctly, it had something to do with land on either side of the railroad tracks. The Railroad Brotherhood Union was lobbying in support of the bill which would affect railroads. It seems that the union was going to ask for higher wages and thought they would be in a stronger position if they were on record as supporting a bill in which the railroads were interested. It was an easy interview, not at all ugly.

When I came into my office at the end of the day's session, two members of the union were waiting to see me. They looked very ill at ease, almost unhappy. They had come to ask for a positive vote in support of the bill in which the railroads were interested. My answer was, "No, I think it is wrong; I can tell you that right now. I am not going to vote for it; I think it is wrong." And so they rose to go. Before leaving, one of the men said, "Well, we had to come; we are supposed to cover this wing of offices. We had to come, but we knew it wouldn't do any good if you were opposed to the bill." To which I replied, "Would you have me vote in a way I think is wrong because you ask me to? Suppose next time someone comes into my office and asks me to vote in a way I think is wrong --in a way that is harmful to the Railroad Brotherhood. How would you like that? If I can be influenced to vote against my better judgment to protect myself, what kind of congresswoman would I be?"

Each time the reciprocal trade agreements came up for a vote in the House, there would be some special interest groups that came to see me. For instance, in Southern California farmers grow nuts. The growers once came to see me asking that I introduce an amendment to forbid the importation of nuts. I regretfully told them why I couldn't do that and explained the advantages for us of supporting the reciprocal trade agreements. If exceptions are made in one instance--after agreements had been arrived at--they will be made on other items and in other countries. I support the reciprocal trade agreements because I believe they are in our best interest.

One year when the reciprocal trade agreements came up, a freshman congressman stopped me in the corridor just before I went onto the floor of the House. He asked me how I was going to vote. I told him. He said he didn't know what to do. The nut growers from his state had come to see him and demanded that he introduce an

Douglas: amendment to the reciprocal trade agreement prohibiting the importation of nuts and, if it didn't pass, they wanted him to vote against the agreements. What did I think he should do? I told him I couldn't advise him. He would have to decide for himself. I was voting for the agreements because they were in the interest of better trade relations for us and other nations.

Fry: Helen, why do you suppose few lobbyists came to talk to you?

Douglas: Oh they came, but not many and not often. Professional lobbyists left me alone. They knew they couldn't influence me. For instance, I was the only member of the California delegation to support President Truman and the Supreme Court on tidelands. They held that the valuable offshore oil deposits were federal properties and must be leased to the oil companies by the federal government. Oil companies were opposed to federal leasing. They financed opposition to federal leasing and lobbied in every conceivable way in support of state leasing.

I was never threatened by anyone speaking for the oil companies. The oil companies were far too clever for that. It was suggested however, by others, that I was wrong in supporting President Truman and the Supreme Court and if I restudied the situation, I would most certainly understand that the oil leases should be under the control of the states. The oil companies must have known that I did not respond to any kind of threat, overt or implied. Instead there was the promise that if I changed my position of tidelands through further study, I could have anything politically I wanted.

I did respond to an objective approach to an issue. I listened very carefully to what people had to say. But, I was not susceptible to special interests--short term interests, localized, not in the long-term general interest.

Compiling the History of the Negro Soldier

Fry: Your "History of the Negro Soldier" is an interesting story.

Douglas: I undertook the writing of the history of the Negro soldier in United States wars in defense of their service in World War II. Congressman John Rankin is responsible for my thinking that the Negro soldier needed defense from someone in the Congress of the United States.

You will remember at a certain time in the war we had severe reverses in Italy. Congressman Rankin took the floor one day and held forth on these reverses, blaming it on the black soldiers who

Douglas: were fighting in Italy. They may have been among those in the front battalions; I think they were. I was so distressed by Rankin's attack and concerned that his words would certainly be repeated to the black soldiers who survived the war when they returned home from overseas, that when I went down to my office at the end of the day, I immediately called the various services. I asked if they would please send me a copy of their records of the black soldiers' participation in World War II and in all previous wars. I knew that black soldiers had fought as far back as the Revolutionary War.

There were no such records. No service had compiled records of Negro participation in World War II or any other war. So I asked each service what they had and was told, "The only records we have are the press clippings. The day-to-day press clippings of World War II."

So I said, "Well, send me those." I thought, you know, that I would receive a small amount of press clippings. Boxes came over! Again I hired a professional person in Washington to read the material and give me a breakdown of it.

When I saw how rich it was, how very important had been the contribution of black men in World War II, even though they didn't have positions of great responsibility, I thought that I really had to give time to it. So I waited, put it off, and at the Christmas vacation, when the Congress was recessed for about three weeks, I got in touch with Lorena Hickok. She was a former newspaperwoman. She lived in the White House, was a very close friend of Mrs. Roosevelt's and had become a close friend of mine through Mrs. Roosevelt. I asked if she would be free for me to engage her help in putting together the story of the Negro soldier in World War II using the clippings that had been sent me by the services.

So again, I would get up very early mornings and start working around six a.m. Lorena would come down (she stayed with me for those weeks we were working together) around nine o'clock and we would start working at ten o'clock. I would walk up and down the floor and dictate to her as she typed.

I worked out an approach to this presentation in a way that would prevent John Rankin from taking exception to it on the floor. In other words, I never said what I thought, I never evaluated the materials I had gathered. I simply put it together in a coherent way so that it could be read to the members of the House when it was together.

I asked for permission to address the House for two weeks at the end of each day's session; I read the whole pamphlet into the Record so it would be there for all time. On the first day, sure

Douglas: enough, Rankin's temper flamed and he started to get to his feet to answer me but was restrained by his friends, southerners who told me afterwards they'd said, "You can't, you can't. Helen is only repeating what the armed forces have said about the service of Negro soldiers. She is reading their record; she is reading nothing but the record."

After the war then, or even before the war was over, men began to return and they would be in the hospital, injured and miserable, and there was nothing to give the black soldier except my pamphlet. The military called me again and again and again to ask how many copies they might have of my pamphlet, "The Negro Soldier."

We printed thousands of them. We paid for them out of my pocket; not by the government. Then finally I said to someone in one of the services, I think it was the army, "Don't you really think now maybe you could print these pamphlets you are using?" It is my understanding now that my pamphlet was the beginning of what today is a continuous record of the history of black soldiers in our armed forces.

Fry: I noticed congressmen often just say, "I move to have this entered into the Record." Then they go ahead and talk about the next item on the agenda. Why did you want to read aloud this whole thing?

Douglas: Oh, I wanted it in the main body of the Record in large print. If you will notice in the Congressional Record something entered into the Record, but not read aloud, is always printed in smaller letters at the back of the Record. If a member is making a major address, such as the one I made on the cost of living, my Market Basket Speech, charts and research material might be included at the back of the Record in small print.

When I had something I wanted the members to listen to, I addressed the House so that my remarks were included in large print in the main body of the Record. The reason I asked for so much time to address the House, in presenting my findings of the Negro soldier's participation in World War II, was to address the members and to answer John Rankin indirectly. Furthermore, if the material was in large print, it could be reproduced.

Fry: So this way you were able to get something in large print that could be reproduced and--

Douglas: Could be reprinted, yes. And then I wanted members to listen to every word of it.

Fry: Did they?

Douglas: Of course they did. You never have the whole House, rarely, rarely --after sessions they are tired; since early morning they have been going--but there are those who stay there who are assigned if they think it is an address that has to be answered, assigned to argue with you on a given issue, who are supposed to be experts, fully informed on that particular issue, whatever it is--housing or rent.

Fry: Did you get any responses or questions at all on "The Negro Soldier?"

Douglas: I don't remember now, but I think there was very little. It wasn't as with housing, which was a running debate.

Employing the First Negro Secretary on the Hill in a White Office

Fry: The other thing that was kind of remarkable about your office is that you hired the first Negro secretary.

Douglas: Yes, the first Negro secretary in a white office.

Fry: How did you come to do that?

Douglas: If you look back over what we have talked about, you will see that I always believed in equal opportunity for all the minorities, equal opportunity of education and advancement. I have opposed discrimination against any group because of color or religion or background. Qualification should be the one criteria for a person to be employed or not employed. And I didn't ever support the employment of people just as token expressions of the fact one was against discrimination. I thought people ought to be qualified for the offices they held.

I represented one assembly district that was wholly black. It seemed to me even from the first time I ran that it was only right that I should have one black secretary in the Washington office. I did not seek a qualified black secretary the first session. I thought I had better let my colleagues come to know me before surprising them with a black secretary.

After the first year, I let it be known in Los Angeles that I would like to bring a black secretary to Washington. I went through some of the assemblymen serving in the state legislature, for instance Gus Hawkins [a Negro] who is now a congressman. They sent women to be interviewed by Florence Reynolds, in my Los Angeles office. The word came back to me in Washington from Florence that no one was qualified. "No one comes into this office that they have sent who is qualified in any way, shape, or form."

Douglas: So I said, "Well, we have to keep looking, that is all."

And then some of the black leaders who were in public office positions in the state came to me and complained that I wasn't taking any one of their people. I said, "Don't misunderstand me. I am going to take a black secretary--"

Fry: These were black people complaining?

Douglas: Yes, yes, yes. "I am going to take a black secretary, but she must be qualified and able to hold her own in our office or it won't do anybody any good."

We found such a person in Juanita Terry. When she came to Washington, I said to her, "Now, Juanita, I haven't brought you here to do anything but be a good secretary. I don't want you to carry on a campaign here for equal rights or civil rights for Negroes. I don't want you to do that. I'm doing that upstairs."

At that time no black person could eat in the House of Representatives dining room, no black secretary. We had some black congressmen, and they couldn't, of course, be kept out of the dining room, but no black secretaries could eat there. We said to Juanita, "You will never eat alone but you will have to eat across the street in the Supreme Court dining room." Someone from our office, one of the other secretaries, always went across the street with Juanita to eat.

She made such a fine record for herself that today there are many black secretaries on the Hill. She went from me to head James Roosevelt's office, and then was head of Gus Hawkins's office. Now she is retired, she retired last year. She was as good anybody on the Hill. Tremendous. And of course, that is the difference. And it was the way we did it, I think.

People would ask me in Los Angeles, "How are you going to do it?" In Washington the press came; for a short time we were besieged by the press. They would come into the office and ask, "Mrs. Douglas, will you make a statement about your new secretary?"

To which I would reply, "I have no statement to make. There is nothing to say."

"But you have a black secretary."

"Yes, I do, that's right. What is so extraordinary about that?" I made no statement; I refused to give Juanita's joining my staff any publicity. I thought, if it is right, why should there be a fuss about it. I'll just do it.

Douglas: I treated the issue of whether or not blacks were really a part of the Democratic party in the state of California exactly the same way. I did not hand out any leaflets or make any announcements such as, "Now we are going to have a change--do an extraordinary thing, we are going to include all the minorities into the Democratic party and invite them to all women's division Democratic functions."

If I thought something was right, I just did it without advertising, just did it. I didn't build up walls of resistance where perhaps there were none. I tried not to antagonize anyone, to soft-pedal changes.

In 1946 we had a problem getting a housing bill out of the Banking and Currency Committee. So I put a petition on the Speaker's desk and we came very close to forcing the bill to the floor. During the period when the petition was on the Speaker's desk, visitors came to Washington from various parts of the country in support of the housing bill and, therefore, my petition. They would come to my office wanting to know if representatives from their state had signed the petition and to find out what they could do to convince their congressmen to sign it if they hadn't.

One time a number of white southerners came from the Deep South, Alabama and Mississippi. They were so astonished to see a handsome black woman sitting at a desk, apparently in full command of herself and her share of office responsibilities, that they were practically speechless when they came into my private office. They said, "We have come to talk about housing but first, Mrs. Douglas, could we talk about your office force. We see you have a black secretary."

And I said, "Yes, now what do you want to know about the housing bill?"

"Is she good?"

"Yes she is, she is outstanding. Now, what do you want to know about the bill?" So it went.

I never believed that if a thing was right you started by declaring that you were doing something noble, you know. If it is right to do something, very simply, you do it. Very often that is the best way; a lot of people go along with you if opposition isn't anticipated, and anyway we were not making Juanita a star figure in order to embarrass anybody. As a result, she just melted into the background as part of the congressional working body. She made her name and prepared the way for the acceptance of black secretaries in white congressional offices. They honored her very greatly when she retired.

Douglas: Her mother, Mrs. Terry, was very prominent in public housing, had a very responsible position. She was respected and trusted throughout greater Los Angeles. Her sons were educated too. It was an educated family.

Fry: How did you find her?

Douglas: Florence Reynolds found Juanita. I was in Washington during the time she was interviewing secretaries. We all knew her mother but I didn't know her mother had a daughter, a clever daughter. The interview had to be undertaken before I returned to California. It was part of Florence Reynold's work to do that kind of job for me.

Fry: So this was the very beginning, then?

Douglas: Yes, Juanita was the first black secretary in a white office. She was in my office for four years.

Fry: Did you get any kickback on this from anyone in your office?

Douglas: Not at first. However, in the office one of our secretaries was a southern young woman from Alabama. My staff was outstanding, every one of them, as was this white southern young woman.

She knew that I was looking for a black secretary but never suggested that she couldn't work in the office with one. Then Juanita came, and she worked with her beautifully, ate lunch with her. There was the same harmonious atmosphere in the office there had always been, complete cooperation in all the work that had to be done. After Juanita had been there oh, I think, three or four months, this young southern woman asked to see me, alone.

She came into my office and said, "I am very sorry but I am going to have to leave because my mother is ill and I have to go back home." We talked a little and then I said, "You have been exemplary in every respect. I understand perfectly why you think you have to leave; I hope before long, racial discrimination will be a thing of the past so that you won't feel as you do now. But, I want you to know I think you have been outstanding. I don't want you to do what you feel you can't do, though my hiring a black secretary is right you know."

"Yes, she said, "I know that it is right. I know it is right and that it must be." I heard then from Evelyn Chavoor, the head secretary of the office, that this southern young woman was so frightened about what they'd say back home in Alabama, her family and friends, that she couldn't stand the strain of working with

- Douglas: Juanita. I never asked anyone to do what they couldn't do. There were certain things that I thought ought to be done, and I did them as quietly and decently as possible, and that was that.
- Fry: Well, that is amazing that that is the only kickback that you got. I thought that you might have had some opposition in your district.
- Douglas: No, no, nothing. I think the reason that we didn't was because I didn't make a big fuss about hiring a black secretary, although it wasn't long before most everyone knew it. We didn't use Juanita to go back and talk in the black assembly district at campaign time, you know. She was in Washington because she merited it and because it was right that we should have a decent proportion of representation in our office. She was not there in order to gain votes. That wasn't why she was hired.

The Roosevelt Redwood Forest Bill*

- Fry: Do you have something else down there on your list?
- Douglas: Another bill outside my work on the Foreign Affairs Committee was the National Redwood Forest bill. Governor Gifford Pinchot, the agronomist and conservationist, was connected with it. The last contribution that he made before he died was to draft the Redwood Forest bill. It was written to save the redwoods. It had the backing of Walter Reuther. The Automobile Workers' Union paid for whatever expenses were incurred in drafting the bill. Governor Pinchot brought the bill to me and asked if I would introduce it.
- Fry: Why would they be interested?
- Douglas: The automobile workers? Because Walter Reuther was one of the outstanding leaders at the time; always interested in good government and everything that had to do with good management of our resources. He was an extraordinary man, really a fine statesman.
- Fry: So this was an altruistic step on his part--
- Douglas: Well, altruism really in a sense--

*See also Helen Gahagan Douglas, "The Proposed Roosevelt Redwood Forest," National Parks Magazine, April-June 1947.

Fry: Self-interest, too?

Douglas: No--well, I guess it was. He realized that unless the trees around the redwoods were scientifically cut, there would one day come a time where there would be an end to the cutting of the trees altogether as in other parts of the country.

Fry: That there would be an end to the trees?

Douglas: Yes, and there would be an end to the work for lumbermen if the woods continued to be cut in the usual way. It would destroy the stand of trees and work for lumbermen. In the process the redwood forest would be irreparably damaged. If the wind were allowed to beat on those ancient trees, eventually they would die. The stands of trees around the redwoods were protecting the redwoods, you see.

Fry: It isn't clear to me how Gifford Pinchot had written the bill.

Douglas: He was the one who advised as to how it had to be written. It was written by lawyers. Gifford Pinchot was the conservationist who called attention to the fact that if the trees protecting the redwoods are cut scientifically, the forest would live and so would the redwoods. It was Pinchot who understood how the trees had to be cut, how the work must be carried out if it was not to endanger the redwoods. Only a conservationist would know that. For the legal working out of it, a lawyer put it into bill form. I may have an extra copy of the redwoods bill in Vermont. If so, I'll give it to you. You will see how really detailed it was.*

Fry: That would be very interesting, especially in view of the later struggles.

Douglas: Right, and to see how much of the bill has been followed.

Fry: Helen, the policy of the Forest Service was not one of preservation at that time; it was one of "utilization" of forests. Does this mean that since this would have been put under the Forest Service, the redwoods would have been cut--

Douglas: It wasn't a question of cutting the redwoods; it was a question of how the trees around the redwoods would be cut, not the redwoods --those ancient redwoods. Governor Pinchot was concerned, as I

*A copy of the act is deposited in the Douglas papers at The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, and in the Douglas collection, University of Oklahoma.

Douglas: was, with the preservation of the redwoods. It was the forest surrounding the redwoods that was threatened. If its windbreak was destroyed, then the redwoods would sooner or later blow down--

Fry: As they did in the Areatata lands?

Douglas: The bill was worked out scientifically so as not to penalize the lumbermen. It outlined how to cut timber scientifically, in such a way that the forest wouldn't be injured and lumbermen would continue to have work every year in cutting trees in the same forest. If they cut the trees that are ready to be taken down in line with the guidelines of the bill; if they are cut properly, there will continue to be a yearly harvesting of trees in the same forest. Lumbermen won't cut the forest over a few times unscientifically, finish the forest and then go on to some other forest. They will have work in the same forest every year if they cut scientifically. The Governor Pinchot bill was in advance of the time I introduced it. Today, conservationists are trying to go even further. When we haven't worked with nature, haven't understood how certain areas can be farmed or used, the results have been disastrous.

The dust bowl was an example of what can happen when the soil is misused. If farmers work against nature, the water table is affected. Everything is thrown out of gear.

Fry: Do you remember how you first got onto this idea of preserving redwoods?

Douglas: Yes. I remember perfectly. It was through Walter Reuther and Governor Pinchot.

Fry: They came to you?

Douglas: Yes. Walter Reuther came first; then Governor Pinchot.

Fry: I notice this comes up in a couple of Congresses, too, and finally was dropped. That bill was being considered when the forest industries were still very sensitive about being regulated by the government.

Douglas: Nobody was going to tell them what to do; yet it was for their own good. It was for their own good in the sense that they would have a continuous, sustained production in the woods.

You see, the reason that it is difficult to get through a bill of that kind is that the redwoods have to do only with California, so what do the other states care about it. They didn't care about it. But had such a program of conservation been established at that time, it would certainly have set a pattern for other areas in the country.

- Fry: I was thinking that maybe you had an enormous amount of opposition because the timber owners were so afraid of any kind of government interference at that time with the forest industries. This has been such a hot issue--
- Douglas: Right, right. And you can be sure that lumbermen were lobbying the rest of the delegation and other people in the Congress.
- Fry: If it could have been presented today, you might have gotten it, with all the sudden interest in "ecology."

Reclamation and the 160-Acre Limitation

- Fry: We haven't gone into the reclamation issue, and that is central to what you are going to be telling me about the 1950 campaign.
- Douglas: Haven't we covered that in any of our other discussions?
- Fry: On the 160-acreage limitation issue, we haven't covered very well what happened in Congress while you were there. We have a running account in these two books that Bea Stern gave us.*
- Douglas: You must have Paul Taylor's record of it. That is all you need, that which you have in the Paul Taylor papers. Just tie it into my work in Congress.

When the reclamation bill came to the floor of the House for renewal, I would work with those who were conservation minded to protect it from crippling amendments. I would confer with government officials such as Arthur Goldschmidt, who headed the Power Division in the Interior Department, in order to keep abreast of what those who wanted to knock out the acreage limitation on federally irrigated land were doing. Before and after the yearly reclamation bill came to us in the House, I would write radio speeches to be carried in California and make speeches in the House in support of reclamation.

Arthur Goldschmidt was Lyndon Johnson's last ambassadorial appointment to the U.N.'s Economic and Social Council. He had for some time held an important post in the United Nations.

*Typescripts of two studies: "Central Valley I: Sheridan Downey and the Central Valley from 1944 to 1949," and "Central Valley II: Some Contemporary Comments Mainly from Newspapers," prepared by Paul S. Taylor, typed carbon. In the Paul Taylor Collection, The Bancroft Library.

Douglas: Secretary Harold Ickes was a good friend of Melvyn's and mine. We carried on a voluminous correspondence. His letters were filled with information about reclamation long before I went to Congress --when I was serving as national committeewoman. Melvyn and I visited Ickes a number of times at his home. They lived in the country outside of Washington. One of the times we stayed with him was the 1940 inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt. Harold Ickes' letters are very informative, quite unlike those of Mrs. Roosevelt's. I regularly discussed reclamation matters with him, with Arthur Goldschmidt and with Dr. Paul Taylor from the University of California at Berkeley.

Every year there was an attack on the reclamation bill and on the Interior Department. It would begin in the Senate, authored by Senator Sheridan Downey. I ran for the Senate in order to take Downey out of Congress, to stop his yearly attack on the 160-acre limitation on land irrigated by federally financed water. Land, that had it not had water, could not have produced food.

Fry: Well, one of the most dramatic things that happened was when they tried to get [Michael] Straus and [Richard] Boke out of the Bureau of Reclamation by--

Douglas: Did Bea Stern tell you anything about that?

Fry: Yes she did, and so did Paul Taylor. I don't understand why they needed a congressional act to do it. Because they were trying to work around [Secretary of Interior] Ickes in the administration to get those two men out?

Douglas: Right, exactly. You see that all the time now. You know, if you don't agree with a court decision, it's, "We will pass a bill and we will take it away from the court."

Fry: According to my notes here, both of these men were upholding the 160-acre limitation. One of them was much firmer than the other. Boke, in charge of the California region, was really standing quite firm. Was this your impression? Or do you remember that much detail about it?

Douglas: I thought they were both very strong. Very strong. But in fact, there may have been something Boke did here in California which Straus couldn't do in Washington. Something that Paul Taylor would have known about more directly than I would back in Washington. But certainly Straus in Washington was strong, very strong.

And the Downey attack was continuous on the Interior Department. The same kind of thing that McCarthy later did to the State Department. They tried to knock out of the department, one way or another,

- Douglas: the two strongest men supporting the program they hoped to change. They couldn't defeat it on the floor and so they tried to do it a different way.
- Fry: In that same year Senator Downey and [William] Knowland, who were the two California Senators, tried to repeal the 160-acre limitation.
- Douglas: That's right.
- Fry: In Texas and California. My view of this is from the Senate because that is the way it happened to be written up. What happened in the House?
- Douglas: Same thing in the House. I have forgotten who introduced it, but there were plenty there to introduce it. Sure. I tell you, it was a continuing fight. You were never free of it. Every year when the reclamation bill came to the floor, the same attack would be made on it.
- Fry: You never had any pressure put on you about this, directly, that you knew about?
- Douglas: No. In 1950 the pressure came on the tidelands bill--it was very indirect, the pressure. When there was word that I would run for the Senate, a message came through Boddy's paper, from his editor, Les Claypool. He came to Washington to see me. He reminded me that Boddy's paper had always supported me, that Boddy was my friend.

He said, "You know, you are wrong on the tidelands issue; we always think about you, support you. We wish you would study these papers I have brought for you to look at to re-examine the position of the oil companies in the hope that you will realize how wrong you are on this issue."

And then there was J.B. Elliot who, after my third election, gave a dinner for me and invited the press. Before the dinner he told me, "Helen, you are smarter than anybody else in the delegation, you can have anything you want, but you are wrong on tidelands." And after the dinner--I told you about the speech I made.

So that was the only pressure, and that wasn't really pressure in the sense that I was threatened in any way. I was just told that I wouldn't have their support, if you call that a threat, you know. I always thought that was the privilege in a democracy, to support someone or not support them. Everyone knew where I stood long before I went to Congress. As national committeewoman and state vice-chairman, I supported the reclamation act; I was studying it and talking about it in the state before I went to Congress, for four long years.

- Fry: The issue at that time was whether to have our reservoirs built by the Army Engineers, because if they built them, then it would not be Bureau of Reclamation water and the 160-acre limitation would not apply. But I think Ickes got a promise that even though if it was built by Army Engineers, that water would still be administered by the Bureau of Reclamation, so that the 160-acre limitation would apply. This was one of the big questions there for maybe two years or so. This thing went back and forth.
- Douglas: Yes, I remember that. But also you will see, when you study that, there was always a new approach to achieve always the same goal. If it didn't work this way, then the opposition would come at it another way. If that didn't work, then they would come at it in still another way.
- Fry: When you first went into Congress, what were your relations with Downey?
- Douglas: Well, you see, I was not in the state when he ran for Senate. Remember that was before my--no, I was here, but I was not in that race, at all. He ran for the Senate in--
- Fry: Nineteen thirty-eight.
- Douglas: That's right. And Melvyn was in that campaign, supporting Governor Olson. It was the first time actors or directors or producers worked in an election. That is why Governor Olson appointed Melvyn to the State Relief Commission and the Welfare Board. I was not active in Olson's campaign.
- Fry: So you were a neutral party to him, is that what you mean?
- Douglas: No. I knew him, you know, but we were never close friends. I thought Olson's record as governor was generally decent except for reclamation. I didn't criticize his record, just kept on talking about reclamation.
- Fry: There was some thought that he changed on reclamation, that he originally was pro 160-acre limitation.
- Douglas: Yes, he did change. He was a liberal at the time he was elected.
- Fry: And he did remain liberal on a lot of other issues, didn't he?
- Douglas: He did, he did indeed. Well, that was the position of so many of the members. They were elected you see, and supported Roosevelt or Truman or whoever it might be, Eisenhower, whoever, Democrat or Republican, and they would have certain programs that they would be for which would get them into heaven, right? And then they would

Douglas: have certain programs that they would kind of put blindfolds on to vote for, because they thought they needed the support of those people to be elected to obtain money contributions.

That is why it is so absolutely essential that bills be drafted and introduced and passed, that will tax everybody in the country so we can get away from this business of large private contributions. I don't see how we can maintain our democratic form of government if we don't. Campaigns are just so expensive. Television is so expensive. Television is a public means of communication and the federal government licenses these stations.

There is no reason that at election time a program can't be worked out whereby there is free time given to the candidates who are running for various offices. They would have to work it some way so that the local offices are also given free time; maybe radio is enough. Some formula must be worked out. We can't go on as now.

John Gardner [of Common Cause] is so right in his approach to this. I think he is making a very great contribution. He is addressing himself to a very serious situation not because anybody is wicked; it has just developed. And so it was with oil; so it was with the reclamation act, and the 160-acre limitation. You know, the Associated Farmers are very powerful and they had and have a lot of money, and if you are a Senator, you want their support, you didn't want them working against you. And so unless you were committed very deeply to the program, you made certain concessions. I couldn't make those concessions to get me to the Senate, or, had I been there, to stay in the Senate.

Fry: This brings me to a particular thing that happened with the oil lobby at that time. (I always think of Ed Pauley, who is a Southern Californian.) Were you at all involved in Truman's effort to appoint him as undersecretary of the navy?

Douglas: Yes, I opposed it.

Fry: Because the navy has a lot to do with oil?

Douglas: Right, they buy a lot of oil.

Fry: He finally had to withdraw the appointment, I guess.

Douglas: That is right. I was opposed to it. I don't know that I made speeches, I certainly sent letters. I was opposed to Pauley's appointment as an undersecretary of the navy.

Peacetime Draft

Fry: We have covered everything on my outline today except the peacetime draft issue, and I notice that is mentioned in this summary here that you had drawn up for the 1950 campaign. You had taken a position, or introduced a bill on peacetime draft.

It started right after the war was over as an issue when the GIs began coming home. Apparently too many came home and were discharged, and not enough men enlisted for us to handle our commitments to the occupation forces. So Truman asked that the draft be continued. It was supposed to die on May 15, 1946, but it was continued, but very grudgingly, by Congress. So that would have been the first time you would have had to make a decision on it. Then it was continued until March 31, 1947, and then it died.

But then in 1948 it was revived in June by the passage of the selective service act, which was during the presidential campaign primary. So I was wondering where you were in all of this.

Douglas: I would have to look it up. I have forgotten what the arguments for and against it were. Instinctively, I was against it. But there might have been arguments made on the government which persuaded me it was necessary. Selective service was necessary.

Fry: We haven't gone into taxes either.

Douglas: I was going to send you this statement of Judge Keyes made in the House. There is a long list of endorsements, especially when I ran for the Senate. But Judge Keyes's statement read on the floor of the Congress meant more to me than any of the others.

Fry: Wishing you luck in your 1950 campaign.

Douglas: Yes, I admired him greatly.

Cancer Control

Douglas: I will tell you about something that we haven't as yet discussed. It is important. Senator Neely of West Virginia and I introduced a bill "Relating to means of curing and preventing cancer." It was actually Senator Neely's bill. He drafted it. At his request, I introduced his bill on cancer in the House; he introduced it in the Senate. He had an interesting career. He had been a member

Douglas: of the House; then governor of his state, after which he returned to the Congress as Senator from his state. Senator Neely had had cancer himself. He came to me and asked me to introduce his bill in the House; help get it through the Foreign Affairs Committee and passed in the House of Representatives.

His bill would have appropriated \$5 billion for cancer research--the amount the U.S. invested in the research which developed the atomic bomb. This was right after the end of the war. We had given the world the atomic bomb. Neely's bill would have given them an international organization, sponsored and supported by the United States, scientists working on cancer. Our government would have gathered together scientists throughout the world foremost in the field of cancer research.

Senator Neely appeared before our Foreign Affairs Committee. Although he was highly respected, he could get nowhere with the members of the committee. It was a great pity that the bill never even got out of our committee.

Apparently no one on the Foreign Affairs Committee fully understood how the bomb dropped on Hiroshima changed the nature of war, made war as an instrument of foreign policy obsolete. I thought it was a beautifully conceived program. Think what we've spent on cancer in these intervening years. A program that would have made a contribution to the world long remembered, one that would have been so meaningful right after the war when everyone was living with the knowledge and fear of the bomb that the U.S. dropped on the Japanese.

My little girl, every morning for months after Hiroshima and Nagasaki would wake at four o'clock in the morning, come to my room and climb into my bed and ask, "Mommy, Mommy, is the bomb going to drop on us tonight? Will the bomb drop on us tonight?" Bill Douglas's son reacted the same way. Justice Douglas's son. Many children were so affected by it. Well, anyway, I worked very hard to try to get the Neely bill through the Foreign Affairs Committee. People like Judd opposed it in our committee.

Fry: On what grounds?

Douglas: I don't know on what grounds. I don't know what their real thinking was. They just opposed it.

Fry: Cancer is something that threatens everyone. You would think--

Douglas: Well, today if you live long enough, one out of two die from heart failure of one kind or another and one out of three die of cancer. A number of young people die from some heart complaint and a number of young people die from cancer today. What was it you asked me? We got lost.

Real Estate Lobby Investigation

Fry: You had a resolution offered to create a select committee to investigate the real estate lobby.

Douglas: Oh, yes. That was when we were having such a fight on the housing bill. I have forgotten the details, but the real estate lobby was behaving outrageously. The methods they used to exert pressure on members, to influence them were reprehensible.

Fry: Who joined with you on that resolution, do you know?

Douglas: I have forgotten, but if you look up the bill in my papers in Oklahoma, you will see. Probably some members of the Banking and Currency Committee.

Equal Rights Amendment

Fry: There is the issue of the Equal Rights Amendment for women.

Douglas: Yes, I was opposed to it. I was not opposed, you know, to equal salaries and all of that, but I was concerned, as was Mrs. Roosevelt; she, too, opposed it. I was concerned that the special protections that had been gained by the Labor Department over the years for women in certain industries would be abrogated.

I was concerned lest the Equal Rights Amendment would put a stop to the spreading practices throughout the land of providing special protection for women in certain industries, or worse, protections already established be set aside. Men would say, "Equal rights! So we're all equal!"

Women are not the same as men. There are certain protections in certain industries they have to have. Today there is so much more support among women for the Equal Rights Amendment, and so many years have passed establishing certain protections for women in the work that they do, that the Equal Rights Amendment cannot now be used against women working in industry. I don't think that was possible if the rights amendment had been passed when I was in Congress.

Fry: The argument for the Equal Rights Amendment then was that you could somehow extend the protection of too much overtime work and too much weight lifting to men also--that was the argument then.

Douglas: That was the Taft-Hartley period, the McCarran Act period; no, it never would have gotten through. When it becomes an amendment to the Constitution now, it is all right. It will work. I really think so.

Fry: Yes, it was quite a different scene on the labor front then. Now labor sees this, I think, as a way of expanding its own equality.

The Business and Professional Women felt the same way you did then, so that according to a newspaper article I read, you had their support, too, on this stand. Did you put in these bills anything on equal pay for equal work and to establish a commission on the legal status of women?

Douglas: I did. Yes. Where are we now?

Fry: The Eightieth Congress, in the first session. Did Mrs. Roosevelt help you at all with this?

Douglas: No, but we talked very often; she was very strongly opposed to the ERA, and she talked against it.

Fry: Was this the commission that became a presidential commission on the status of women that is in existence now?

Douglas: I really don't remember whether it was the result of my bill or that of someone else. I know I introduced a bill on it.

Women in Congress

Fry: Did you ever find that you had any particular problems with women voters?

Douglas: No. I don't think so. There were certain women I think, generally, who were suspicious of giving too much authority to women. They had been brainwashed. I always had very wide female support.

Fry: I would be interested to know how you read the attitude of women at that time, for instance, toward a woman who was active and out in the world and in Congress. This was the time when the women were changing from their role of being very active in the war to settling back home, which now we look at as quite a backlash: they all went home and closed their doors.

Douglas: Well, they really didn't settle back immediately. You remember at the end of the war, I told you that women came from all over the country in support of the United Nations and the joining of

Douglas: specialized agencies of the United Nations. So they didn't settle back immediately; that came after '50. They were very active up to then. I was the chairman of the Foreign Affairs sub-committee that held hearings on UN specialized agencies. Women supported our joining them.

The more interesting thing about the support I had was the fact that I had so much male support, powerful men who hadn't supported women before.

Fry: You mean politically powerful and--

Douglas: I mean powerful in the country, you know. Men who held positions, men like [W.] Averell Harriman, Harold Ickes and Laurence Hewes. Hewes headed the West Coast Farm Security Administration. After the war, he was sent to Japan to reorganize the land pattern there. Dr. Frank Graham was another very strong supporter of mine.

Fry: Oh, at Lockheed.

Douglas: No, the president of the University of North Carolina, later the Senator from North Carolina. People like that. I will send you some lists. Such support was more unusual when I ran for the Senate. It is all very well to send a woman to the House, but to send her to the Senate is something else. I think the division of women for and against me was a normal division one would have. There were some women for me and some who disagreed with my stands.

Fry: Not because you were a woman?

Douglas: No, no.

Fry: What about men, did you feel that their being for or against you--

Douglas: I really never was made to feel, either in campaigning or in the Congress, that I was treated differently because I was a woman. I mean by that, nothing was made of my sex, just as nothing was made of the sex of a male in Congress. Of course, they outnumbered us very greatly, there was just a handful of women, but it seemed to me that there was always a sincere, direct discussion of an issue in the Foreign Affairs Committee and in the House of Representatives.

Perhaps that was partly because I had a very strong father. I learned at an early age to hold my own and then I have never been a dithery woman. [laughter] Having three brothers I was used to male company, used to their agreeing or disagreeing with me. So I was at ease in Congress, although it was predominantly male.

Douglas: Again, it was rather the same as getting a black secretary, you know. If you are at ease about what you do, and I was convinced it was right, it just doesn't become an impediment between you and other people. There is no psychological problem that you yourself have created and therefore have to solve. So I had nothing to solve, either in presenting myself for a seat in Congress, or presenting myself to the members of the House of Representatives, or in running for the U.S. Senate. It never occurred to me that because I was a woman I was less qualified than some man. It just never occurred to me.

Fry: You don't remember ever getting any remarks about that from the male members of Congress?

Douglas: No, no. There may have been remarks, but I didn't hear them. There was never anything of which I was conscious in that way, no.

Fry: It seems that when women go to legislatures, they usually wind up on the health and welfare committee or something that has to do with rearing children or education. I was a little surprised, for that reason, that you jumped right into the Foreign Affairs Committee, because I thought you would have been assigned to Health and Welfare just because you were a woman.

Douglas: But look at Congresswoman Mary Norton, who was assigned to the Labor Committee. She came from New Jersey, was the first woman to become chairman of that important committee, and one of the most powerful chairmen in the House. She had no political experience before she ran for Congress at the urging of May or Hague. The wage-hour bill was put through under her chairmanship. I sat in the gallery watching her before I was in Congress. She had control of the membership in the House every minute during the debate. She was really splendid.

So, I think if a member is prepared when they talk, and know what they are talking about, they are listened to, seriously. If they don't know what they are talking about, whether male or female, they are not listened to. No one is going to give close attention to a member just because he is a male. If he is talking a lot of hot air or talking to impress the folks back home, and not addressing himself to the facts of the bill under consideration, the congressmen don't pay any attention to him.

Tax Reform

Fry: Did you want to get into taxes? Because you had some ideas on how the taxes could be revised to combat inflation.

Douglas: Yes. I think it is perfectly clear in that bill you mentioned on the cost of living credit: when the cost of living is going up, to impose a tax on excess profits and repeal certain excise taxes. Remember the excise taxes during the war, and the repeal of them after the war because they hurt badly the lowest economic group. A lot of that is perfectly clear in the bill. If you want to see it or other bills, you will find them there among my Oklahoma papers.

Fry: Well, what I wanted to ask you about was how your position changed or didn't change from the Eightieth Congress.

If you will look on the third page of the whole thing, down at the bottom, you will see that the bill that you introduced in 1947--

Douglas: Well, I think what they have done here is they introduced it in '47, you see, and then they list the bills here at the end; that is why you see it twice.

Fry: It is still the Eightieth Congress.

Douglas: That is right. The cost-of-living cut of \$100 for every federal taxpayer and each of his dependents and the imposition of the excess profit tax. And shortly after that tax program, the president announced a program that followed generally those lines.

Problems would come into the office describing how people were suffering, you know, particularly the aged. I introduced a bill on the aged which Elizabeth Wickenden outlined for me.

When you get back to New York you should talk to Arthur Goldschmidt and his wife, Elizabeth Wickenden. She is an authority on public welfare. She was an adviser to Lyndon Johnson, a very close personal friend of Johnson's, as was Mr. Goldschmidt. While I was in Congress we were always conferring--we were also very close friends--and we were always discussing the problems of welfare and taxes and how they affected people. I worked and talked about all these issues all the time.

We are beginning to get to the problems of the aged; we still have a long way to go. Some of Wicki's recommendations are now law. At that time, my bill on the problems of the aged was advanced. It

Douglas: recognized what old people were facing in the country in the post-war years and looked ahead.

Fry: Did you lose on that bill; did it not pass?

Douglas: No, it didn't pass. It was ahead of its time. Just as my bill was to protect men of the press, the bill that had to do with newspapermen. Do you remember the recent Al Friendly article about it?

You know if you could go back through the history of reforms and the establishment of programs, it takes a long time to get them through Congress, but you will see there has to be a beginning. The whole program of conservation in our country is so interesting in that respect, the different people that worked for it. The Norrises and the La Follettes, people like that, going back much further.

Civil Liberties in Congressional Committees

Fry: In the area of civil liberties, you have "Congressional Investigating Committees, Proscribe the Procedures of," and in 1947 on December 1 you introduced a bill to "guarantee the accused the right of defense before congressional committees."

Douglas: That had to do mainly with the Committee on Un-American Activities, but it applied to all of them. The Committee on Un-American Activities was the only one investigating anyone, the only committee before whom you had to defend yourself.

Fry: And you didn't have the right to confront your accuser, I remember, for a while. So I wondered if this had led to the introduction of that bill? That was before McCarthy really got going.

Douglas: That's right.

Fry: Was there anything else along that line of civil liberties?

Douglas: I introduced a bill on the poll tax. That's perfectly clear. Let's go down the list you have there. I introduced a bill to allow the wives of U.S. soldiers to enter the United States to join their husbands. It was cruel to separate couples. I introduced a number of private bills to protect G.I. marriages.

My tax on Constitution Hall. I thought it outrageous when the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to allow Marian

Douglas: Anderson to sing in Constitution Hall. Grandmother was a Daughter of the American Revolution. I think she would have approved of my taxing the hall to show my displeasure.

I voted to eliminate a tax permitting people to vote. We got rid of the poll tax, thank goodness.

Fry: No, but not at that time.

Douglas: No, but the poll tax came up every session. You declared where you stood on the matter.

FEPC Act and the Southerners' Tactics

Douglas: And then there is the FEPC and the southerners' tactics. Well, FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission] came before us almost every year. Mary Norton, chairman of the Labor Committee, was in charge of the bill. It was her responsibility to get it voted out of the Labor Committee after which she had to get a rule from the Rules Committee in order to bring it to the floor of the House for consideration by the Committee of the Whole.

Mary and I were close friends. I went with her to the Rules Committee to give her moral support. A number of men on the Rules Committee opposed to FEPC made it as difficult as possible for Mary to get a rule. When the bill came to the floor, I was always in the chamber with Mary or sitting close by.

The technique of those who wanted to defeat FEPC was ingenious. The opposition mostly came from the South. In fact, the technique of defeating the FEPC was wholly southern. After about ten minutes of discussion of the bill by the Committee of the Whole, the southerners would get up one by one and as unobtrusively as possible, go to the back of the chamber and disappear into a room set up with tables and chairs where members could obtain soft drinks.

However, one southerner would remain on the floor. As soon as a sufficient number of liberal Democrats and Republicans also left the chamber, the southerner who had remained on the floor would rise and say, "Mr. Chairman, point of order, we don't have a quorum." The chairman would count the House and see that there wasn't a quorum, whereupon there would have to be a roll call which would take at least half an hour, thereby interrupting the discussion of the bill. This went on all day long, using up the time for the consideration of FEPC.

Douglas: You may well ask why did the liberals leave? I can't answer that. I know why the Republicans who left did so; they were opposed to FEPC. But the liberal Democrats weren't. They went back to their offices to answer their mail or catch up on office work. They weren't concerned enough about FEPC or they didn't understand, which is hard for me to believe, what the southerners were up to. Why didn't liberal Democrats remain in the chamber, why did they return to their office to carry on routine office work, I don't know. Perhaps because they weren't sufficiently interested.

It wasn't the habit of the female members of the House to go into the room where the southerners were comfortably sitting, drinking Coca Cola or gingerale and smoking if they cared to. Only men used that gallery. We women didn't go into it. There was no prohibition against our doing so, we just never did. We used the gallery which ran at right angles from the one where the southerners were sitting. That gallery had telephones which we used, and we used them that day again and again to try to get liberal members back on the floor, liberal Democratic members, before another roll call was made.

At the end of one such day I was particularly frustrated and annoyed with our Democrats and with the southerners. We were getting nowhere at all, those of us who were supporting FEPC, never leaving the floor except to use the telephones. Suddenly, I guess in despair, needing to do something positive, I rushed down the center aisle through the doors where the southerners were sitting, happily content with their strategy and exclaimed at the top of my lungs, "Why don't you get on the side of God?" [laughter] "There isn't anything we couldn't do in this country if you'd only get on the right side."

Although I disagreed with the southerners on so many issues, I had to admire their steadfastness. They set out to defeat the FEPC bill. They were in earnest, whereas we couldn't hold our members on the floor.

I used to tell my constituents back in California, "We cannot dismiss the South. The South is very conscientious in support of what they believe. They don't play around at all." As a group, those in Congress were outstanding, they really were. Even John Rankin. I was so riled by that man! I thought him so outrageous in the stands that he took and in what he said on the floor. But he was a superb parliamentarian. And he was right on one critical issue, reclamation. And as much as I disliked him, and opposed him, when it came to reclamation, we worked together.

Red-Baiting in Congress

Fry: Helen, one thing you haven't put on tape about the southerners was a story that you told me last winter. I can't identify it except for an image that you created in my mind of you standing in Congress calling the southerners' bluff on something, and other men standing around you to support you.

Douglas: Oh, yes. That was Rankin again. Rankin was so sure of himself, of what he could do, what was permitted on the floor and what was not permitted on the floor, but he so hated every liberal program except for the reclamation program, and so despised all of us newcomers who were liberals (to him, we were all extreme radicals), that he would get up every now and then and just give vent to his venom. He would wave his arm and say, looking at us, "These left-ists, these Communists--"

I have the same kind of explosive disposition that Rankin had. When I was first in Congress, I don't think I had been there more than a few months; I was sitting with a group of newcomers and I rose suddenly, because he was waving his hand at where we were all sitting (we were all supporters of Roosevelt, right down the line), and I stood up. It was in the Committee of the Whole, so Rayburn was not in the chair, and I said, "Mr. Chairman, I demand to know if the gentleman from Mississippi is addressing me."

Rankin looked at me--oh, what a look--and went right on talking, but I remained standing. And Wright Patman, chairman of the Banking and Currency Committee, pushed through our aisle where we freshman congressmen were sitting; pushed members out of the way so that he could sit beside me. I forget who came to sit on the other side of me but it was another senior member of the House of Representatives.

Wright said to me, "Helen, just stand where you are. He has to answer you. You don't have to ask again. Stand where you are." And the chairman banged his gavel and said, "The gentleman from Mississippi will answer the congresswoman from California."

Rankin didn't answer and started going on, so the Speaker was summoned. For a point of order, the Speaker has to be in the chair, and so Sam Rayburn came in. In the meantime, somebody ran down to the coffee shop where Lyndon Johnson was and said, "Douglas has taken on Rankin."

He came running up the steps, three at a time. The Speaker was banging his gavel but Rankin was not answering. Lyndon told me afterwards what he said to the Speaker when he went up to Rayburn.

Douglas: He whispered, "Are you going to let the man from Mississippi run the House of Representatives?" And Rayburn scowled at Lyndon and banged his gavel and said, "The gentleman from Mississippi will answer the gentlewoman from California." And then Rankin--that was my first real run-in with Rankin--had to answer and say, "I am not addressing the gentlewoman from California."

I just thought it was outrageous. He had done everything but point to us and say, "These Reds, sitting over there." And I thought, well, we had better have this one out. And anyway my temper exploded. I was not used to being addressed that way.

Fry: That business of his charging you with Reds reminds me of something that--

Douglas: He didn't charge--he was too good a parliamentarian to charge anybody with that.

Fry: Paul Taylor brings out the fact that people thought that he was a Red because he supported the 160-acre limitation, and I wondered if you had found this was true. He mentions that the FBI came around and asked him questions a couple of times. Did you have that experience?

Douglas: No, I never had that.

Fry: You never did see any signs of being followed or anything?

Douglas: No.

Fry: Especially as the McCarthy era wore on?

Douglas: No, by then I had left Washington. The really big McCarthy disturbance in the Congress was after 1950. There was plenty going on before, of course. But no, I never had any of that.

Did I tell you about the other time that Rankin was carrying on on the floor so, because Henry Wallace was coming to town to speak? Did I tell you that?

Fry: I don't think so.

Douglas: It was during or after the campaign. Wallace was heading the third party. Constitution Hall refused to let him speak there. He finally settled for the outdoor concert platform on the river where people came to listen to concerts in their cars or sitting on the grass.

Douglas: If I remember correctly, Rankin suggested that the Committee on Un-American Activities keep a list of those who would be going to hear Wallace.

Of course, it was outrageous that the Daughters of the American Revolution wouldn't allow Wallace to speak in Constitution Hall. But you probably remember that they wouldn't allow Marian Anderson to sing there either; that was when I put in the bill to tax Constitution Hall. Harold Ickes saved the situation that time. He invited Miss Anderson to sing in the auditorium of the Interior Department. He said he'd be honored to have her do so.

Well, anyway, Wallace was coming to town and Rankin thought a list should be made of those who would hear him speak. In other words, for Rankin it was un-American to listen to Henry Wallace speak. I was so distressed by his statement that I rose to my feet and asked to address the House when he was finished.

This all took place at the beginning of a session, in the period when members could ask for a few minutes to hold forth on some issue. My friend, Chet Holifield, had been one of the first congressmen to speak. He'd read a telegram from a Californian criticizing "the Un-American Activities Committee." At that point, Rankin rose and interrupted Chet, stating that the gentleman from California was out of order. Whereupon a vote was taken and the majority of the members agreed with Rankin that Chet was out of order--even though he was only reading a telegram from one of his constituents who called the Committee on Un-American Activities the "Un-American Activities Committee."

As punishment for speaking out of order, a member is denied the floor that day, which doesn't mean much but is considered a minor disgrace.

As I walked down the aisle to address the House following the censure of Chet, I had to pass John McCormack, the majority leader. He let out a gentle moan with, "Oh, no--not you, too, Helen."

I walked into the well of the House, and addressing the members, said that I just wanted to simplify the recordkeeping of those going to hear Henry Wallace speak by suggesting that they put my name at the top of the list, for I would be going!

I had no intention of going to hear Henry Wallace. As a matter of fact, I didn't go hear him--I was too busy. I wasn't particularly interested. I still liked Wallace and admired him as one of our great secretaries of agriculture, although I thought he'd been terribly mistaken in allowing people to influence him to

Douglas: head a third party. But it was such a violation of one's right to be heard in a free country without being labeled un-American, that I had in some way to express my opposition to Rankin's list keeping.

It was something Rankin said that prompted me to write my Democratic Credo. It was after my contretemps with him when he waved his hand and said, "these Communists" and I demanded to know if the gentleman from Mississippi was addressing me. It was after that that I wrote my Democratic Credo. I thought well, I better make my liberal position clear, put it in print before everyone. All of this took place in my first term.

Fry: What happened to that Credo?

Douglas: I read it into the record. I asked permission to address the House for an hour at the end of a session on a certain day and read it to the members and for all time into the Congressional Record.*

Fry: Did you ever get any indication that your Democratic Credo was picked up and used by any other group?

Douglas: No, I didn't. If someone asked for a copy of my Credo, you know, we'd send it to them. I don't think we used it as a campaign piece of literature or anything like that.

Fry: You are mentioning what good parliamentarians the southerners were.

Douglas: Well, particularly Rankin and a few of the others. They weren't all good parliamentarians, but a few--

Fry: It made me wonder, how long does it take one to catch on to all the rules of the House and learn these? Did you make a quick study of it?

Douglas: Instinctively, you know. I didn't make the kinds of statements that would cause a member to be ruled out of order. I very quickly understood, not only reading the manual of rules, exactly how I could say what I wanted to say and still keep within the restrictions of the rules. If the rules of behavior aren't observed by members, tempers would flare and very soon the chamber would become a battleground and it would be impossible to legislate.

Fry: What about the process of getting a bill through, at first? Did you find that difficult?

*See Appendix

Douglas: There is no problem at all about dropping a bill in the hopper and having one's name on it, you know. Of course, there are too many bills dropped in the hopper. Getting a bill to the right committee depends on where it is assigned. When it gets to that committee the lobbying begins, not by outsiders, but by you, to try to explain to the members of the committee and the chairman why they should vote it out.

Although I was able in the Foreign Affairs Committee to introduce a number of very important amendments and to prevent crippling amendments from passing by arguing, debating, and discussion, I must say that in the House, aside from my contribution to bills which I co-sponsored with others, I was not successful in getting through bills which I introduced alone, such as the Redwood Bill and the [one on the] problems of aging, which were ahead of their time and which I introduced alone. For example, the housing bills came through the Banking and Currency Committee. It was only in the Foreign Affairs Committee that I could really be instrumental in seeing that bills came out of committee intact.

Veterans

Fry: There is only one other area here, and that is the veterans.

Douglas: I was very active in helping the veterans after World War II, yes, trying to get whatever was needed. I regularly went to the hospitals to see them, and I was terribly concerned about the condition of so many. I remember my unhappiness in returning to California and seeing more paraplegics than anyplace else--veterans paralyzed below the waist. They needed chairs, they needed ramps in the hospitals, to get up and down steps, you know. They couldn't manage stairs, so there had to be ramps to get up to a floor.

I did everything I could to help them. I spoke with key people in the administration and the committee on veterans in the House. I spoke to the president. Wherever I could bring any influence, I talked about the needs of the paraplegics. I was terribly concerned about them.

I am concerned today about Vietnam veterans. I think that the cutting back of the funds for rehabilitation and education that would put them in jobs is just outrageous, outrageous. One could disapprove of the Vietnam War, as I did, but that doesn't mean that the men that we sent there and who have suffered through this shouldn't be taken care of as they were in any other war. Why pretend it wasn't a war? How long can we go on pretending that?

Fry: That is the end of my questions, Helen, and it is late.

Douglas: Now you know all these other names? Let me just put down these, in case you have time to see them.

Stands Taken in Congress: Foreign Affairs Committee

Atomic Power

Fry: What is on your list in the key legislation that came before the Foreign Affairs Committee?

Douglas: Atomic [weapons]--but no, Chita, the bill you're referring to came out of the Military Affairs Committee.

But let me preface my remarks about that bill by reminding you that Melvyn and I believed that Europe's war against Hitler was our war, that World War II was our war. Melvyn went overseas although he didn't have to. His age was just one day short of the deadline but he wanted to serve in the army because he believed in the rightness of the war. He didn't have to go. He served during the war in the India-Burma-China theater.

But when we dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and again an atomic bomb on Nagasaki, war had become for me an anachronism, war had become an obsolete weapon of foreign policy. I haven't changed my thinking in this respect. That is why, in the years since I left Congress after being defeated in the '50 campaign, I have followed so closely our foreign policy and the development of the arms race.

[Helen Gahagan Douglas rewrote the following portion of the transcript.]

And in giving lectures I have supported the United Nations, supported all cooperative efforts throughout the world, warned against the people of any nation thinking they can run the world by themselves, and have opposed the arms race. If the arms race isn't checked, brought under control, it will inevitably lead to the last catastrophic war. If we continue to prepare for war, war is what we will get. A continuing preparation for war will finally erupt in war.

Shortly after the war was over in Europe I became aware, quite by accident, of the fact that the Military Affairs Committee of the House had sent a bill to the hopper to be printed putting

Douglas: the future development of the vast new power harnessed by scientists, the power of the sun, which was unleashed in the making of the atomic bomb, under the control of the military.

Fry: How did you find out? Did you just happen to--

Douglas: It was accidental. A scholar associated with the automobile workers, Dr. Robert Lamb, stopped by my office around 6:00 p.m. to ask me if I knew that the Military Affairs Committee had that afternoon sent a bill to be printed putting the future control of the development of atomic power under the military. He said, "There were no public hearings, Mrs. Douglas. I thought you'd like to know." And with that bit of shocking information, Dr. Lamb left.

I sent for the bill, read it, and thought, "It isn't possible, it isn't possible, we are now going to tell the world that we who dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, that destroyed the city and killed most of the people in the city and radiated the rest of them, that we are now going to put this new energy under the military. What will we be saying to the world?"

I called my brother who was the assistant to the U.S. Attorney in the Southern District of New York and told him, "I am coming to New York this evening," and asked if he could see me. He said, "Of course." I also asked if he could gather at his home some top lawyers in the United States Attorney's office and others with whom he'd worked to read a bill I was bringing with me to see if it was as bad as I thought it was.

I took the bill with me to New York; the lawyers studied it. I said, "Well, what do you think? Is it as bad as I think it is?" They all said, "It's worse."

I flew back to Washington on a late plane. The next morning was Saturday. Evelyn Chavoor and I spent the day in the office contacting key newspapers throughout the country. I spoke with the editor or owner or whoever was in charge. I told each of them I was mailing to their newspaper a copy of a bill which had just been printed without public hearing, giving the development of atomic power to the military. The administration didn't know about the bill, they'd had nothing to do with it.

I asked each person in charge of a newspaper if they thought public hearings should be held on a matter of such importance. If so, would they write about it in their newspaper. If they thought that new hearings should be held, public hearings as to who will be in control of the development of atomic power, would they urge that

Douglas: the Military Affairs Committee reopen hearings on the future development of atomic power. This would give the administration time to act in the matter.

The response from each newspaper was the same, whether Republican or Democrat. They agreed that there should be public discussion as to the development of the new power science had unleashed. That the future development of atomic power was too serious, too far-reaching, to permit the legislation determining it to be carried on in secret.

I pointed out that we had to re-examine everything we did in the light of the new power. We had to understand what we could do and what we couldn't do. I learned later that those who supported the May-Johnson bill hoped it could pass the Senate under a number without discussion. That had been done once or twice before in our history; it wasn't something that hadn't ever been done before, but it wasn't good in this instance. The bill was recalled which gave the administration time to introduce a bill.

[End of Helen Gahagan Douglas revisions.]

Fry: There was a Douglas-McMahon bill--

Douglas: That was the administration bill.

Fry: Was that Douglas you?

Douglas: That was me, yes. That was the administration bill, and the chief specialist for the administration was James R. Newman; he is dead now. He was a very brilliant man, a close friend of Leo Szilard.

My office became the center really for scientists coming in to Washington at that time. We made space for them. We would move our girls together and give them a desk to work at. They then talked to congressmen explaining what had happened in the world with this new power. It was the first time really scientists became active politically. And as a result of that actually, some of the atomic scientists, Einstein one of them, started the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists.* Do you know that magazine? Well, that grew out of this interest.

Fry: That is when they had all gotten together--

Douglas: And this was not simply politics in the ordinary sense. They came there to say, "Look, it is a new world. This is what these weapons can do and in the foreseeable future what weapons will be able to

*Probably Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, begun about 1952. Ed.

Douglas: do." Their only effort at that time was to put atomic energy under civilian control, not put it under the military, sending out to the world the message that this new force was to be handled by the military.

Fry: It is hard to think now that we ever considered putting it under the military, but back at that time, when it was less than a year after the public had become shockingly aware that we had this great weapon, how did people line up on this? I was reading in Barck and Blake last night that some people reacted by advocating giving the secret of the atom bomb to every country so everybody would be equally powerful.* And then on the other hand, we had people who said we should keep it completely secret, destroy what we have, and not let it out at all.

Douglas: There were any number of approaches as to what should be done with this new power. The one that became the center of our activities was the one that believed that we could develop atomic power under civilian control, and let the world know that we would guard the knowledge of how to make the bomb. Be very careful not to spread it but to guard what information we had very carefully.

Of course, the weakness of that position was in the fact that once the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, it was no longer a secret. Also, there was the fact that in trying to make something, in any new undertaking, half of it at least is knowing it can be done. Moreover, we aren't the only people who have scientists in the world. Furthermore, the basic knowledge that led to the making of the bomb was the result of an accumulation of scientific research carried on for many years in various countries.

We had the secret program which President Roosevelt authorized because European scientists warned the president that the Germans might be trying to make such a bomb, that they had the facilities to make such a bomb. That is why Roosevelt agreed to make an atomic bomb and it was carried out so secretively, because scientists, foreigners, were frightened that that was exactly what the Germans were up to. And that if the Germans had that weapon in the war, that would end the war; they would be in control of the world.

And so it was a fallacious argument that if we just locked up this, we would all be safe. The danger was that many people became so neurotic on the subject that they did a lot of foolish things which eventually led to McCarthyism and such political activities that we have suffered from ever since.

*Barck, Oscar and Nelson Blake, Since 1900 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), p. 777.

Douglas: It is too bad that the international control of atomic energy as we proposed it didn't go through. I think, looking back on it now, there is a lesson to learn in this. The Russians, who were not about to let us be the only people in the world to have the bomb, were not a bit frightened by the fact that we had the bomb. That lesson has been brought up again and again: you don't frighten people the way you believe they will be frightened.

For instance, in the Vietnamese War now that has been so disastrous for us, for them, for the United Nations, we had these modern weapons, these terrible weapons that we unleashed on South-east Asia. It didn't stop them, it didn't frighten them. We even at times, because we refused to say we wouldn't use atomic weapons under certain conditions, implied indirectly you know, that even atomic weapons would be used. Not as powerful as the atomic bomb, but nevertheless atomic weapons.

Fry: Is this lack of great fear because they rely on the power of our public opinion in this country? In other words, does our form of government have anything to do with it?

Douglas: No, I don't think so. I don't think it has anything to do with our form of government. People just don't frighten the way one believes they will frighten. It is perfectly inexplicable to me that we are as sanguine as we are about the arms race. Not only we, but people of the world. There isn't a nation in the world that hasn't said that a world war will be catastrophic, dangerous for everybody. Yet we all go on, everybody. There has never been such a saturation of weapons throughout the world as there is today. I don't mean just atomic weapons, nuclear weapons, but weapons--people are just not frightened.

And I think that what happens--I really think we were neurotic for a while, and it affected our foreign policy very greatly, and it affected the foreign policies of other peoples in the world. Politically, the fear of spies was used to gain political office.

Fry: This was in 1945 before the concept of the Iron Curtain and just before England and the United States lined up together on one side with Russia on the other. At this point we still didn't quite have that schism.

Douglas: No, we didn't.

Fry: So I wonder if you can remember if our fear of Russia entered into this?

Douglas: Oh, all along, all along there was fear of Russia, and as I started to say before, it shows how countries are not frightened. Russia was not about to have us have the atomic bomb. I don't think Russia

Douglas: ever thought we would go and drop it on her, you know, but was not about to have us have that bomb to use politically over her head, you see, as a political weapon.

And France was the same way. De Gaulle said he was all for international controls, but France was not about to be the only nation that said, "We don't have any nuclear weapons." As long as there was an arms race, they were going to have some of their own. China is saying the same thing. England went along, has some herself of course. They were so closely allied to us that it was almost the same, you know.

Fry: What about the members of your committee? Did any of them for a minute want this kept under the military?

Douglas: I have forgotten what the final vote was. That didn't come to our committee, you see, it went to the Military Affairs Committee. That bill never came to our committee. I have forgotten; that is easy enough to check. On the floor, I would think that a few of them probably did. A number of people who were on that committee such as Mundt and Judd--I don't know, one would have to go back and look at the record.

Fry: We can look at that. I thought we might have been missing a good story here.

Douglas: No. When James Newman wrote his book on atomic energy, he dedicated it to McMahon and me because of the work we'd done in helping bring the development of atomic energy under civilian control. Also, for what we did to help inform and educate our colleagues.

Jim Newman was largely in charge of the Douglas-McMahon bill which, as I said, was the administration bill. He saw to it that the scientists talked and explained to certain key Senators and members of the House. For the scientists, it was a process of education in and out of Congress. It was a totally new world into which we had come. It was another great change, as great as the discovery of the wheel, the use of fire, and later of steam in the world. I mean, it was this kind of revolutionary change in our lives which I don't think people fully realized then or even today.

I remember in an interview Dr. Oppenheimer pointed out the devastation nuclear weapons would cause if they were used in the future. And then his interviewer asked, "Well, if that is so, Dr. Oppenheimer, maybe only scientists should be allowed to occupy the highest offices in our government, to which he said, "No, no, no, no. But those in the highest offices must be informed and must know, and they must know exactly, precisely what they can do and what they cannot do, how this new power can be used and how it dare not be used."

Fry: No more questions here. What is next on your outline?

United States Military Aid Versus Using the United Nations

Douglas: As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, I supported Roosevelt and the United Nations, and the recovery of Europe, the Marshall Plan and then NATO. We didn't know what Stalin was up to or what they would do. The only time that I parted with the administration was when President Truman was in office, and Dean Acheson and the president were in favor of Greek-Turkish aid. I was opposed to that bill because it bypassed the United Nations. Let me briefly give you the background on that bill.

At the end of the war, England was sufficiently weakened so that they could not maintain their positions in certain parts of the world, where they had been for years and years. Greece was one of them. They had to withdraw from Greece because they couldn't keep their forces there. It left a vacuum.

Fry: Was this the anxiety over the Dardanelles?

Douglas: You mean, why were they there originally? Well England, you know, was the balancing power for well over one hundred years. It was her navy that sailed the seas and maintained the peace. That was true up to World War I. So that England occupied certain areas of the world we didn't. We had certain interests, but they were not out around the world. And when England began to withdraw from her former positions, we stepped in to fill that vacuum again and again. Such a vacuum existed in Greece.

Now in Greece and Turkey, two things were happening. On the border of Turkey, the Russians had mobilized some forces, and that was highly disturbing to the Turks. They had to increase their military they claimed, and that meant that they didn't have the money that they needed for their domestic needs.

In Greece there was a civil war. Undoubtedly some of those in the civil war were Communists. Those fighting the government in the civil war would go over the border to Yugoslavia and rest and get aid from Yugoslavia and arms and come back across the border. These facts as presented by the administration at that time were not disputable and I was not opposed to doing something in this area.

What I was opposed to, and believed then, and I believe today, and I think I have been borne out as being correct, was that if indeed the Russians had brought military forces close enough to the border of the Turkish country, the question of the propriety of this

Douglas: should be brought to the attention of the world as a warning to the Russians. And the place to do that was in the Security Council. It was not up to us unilaterally to go in and take charge. First of all, our action didn't make it a problem or the concern of all the countries of the world, it was our problem alone.

And I considered that by-passing the United Nations was going down the wrong road. It was going down the road that in the past had always led to trouble, and it was departure from everything that we said we had to do in the future if peace was to be maintained in the world.

Fry: Did you try at all at this time to talk to the White House on this?

Douglas: I did not talk to the White House, but I talked to Dean Acheson, who came before our committee every day. I testified every day along these lines exactly.

Remember, Greece was an oligarchy. The Greek people had suffered terribly in the war. Armies had crossed Greece five times. They were a people who had suffered mightily in the war, and I believe that the civil war was a war that was caused by the suffering of the people, with some agitation of the Communist party within Greece, most of whom valiantly fought against the Germans.

When we were still in China we worked at the grassroots where it was possible to improve the conditions of the farmers on the land and the people in the cities and the lowest economic rung of the ladder. And we were proposing the United States give economic and military aid to Chiang Kai-shek without ever guaranteeing that the government would be concerned with the needs of the people!

It seemed to me then, and it has proven to be so, that what we really were saying was, "If we would be sure in filling this vacuum that the English had filled before, that if Russia was indeed the enemy, (and it was indeed at that time in our minds, the enemy in the sense that we didn't know if Russia would push west, you see) that our position was going to be that any government that would be on our side against Russia, against the Communists, was a government we were going to help regardless of how they treated their people."

We were betraying everything that we had stood for, or thought we had stood for, or hoped we stood for. I believed that the end of that would be self-defeating. I think and I have always thought that our war in Southeast Asia, which has been so costly for everyone, so disastrous, is the direct result of this kind of policy. Not because people were wicked. Nobody was wicked, nobody set out to do anything that was wicked, but they believed they could oppose the Communist governments by supporting governments that were also very oppressive.

Fry: That started a long series of that sort of foreign involvement, and I would like to get a picture of what it was like fighting this right there on the ground where you were.

Douglas: Well, I offered some amendments, on the floor, that would have corrected some of the weaknesses that I thought were there. And when they weren't accepted, I voted against the bill. I felt very strongly about it.

Fry: What was the opposition to taking this to the United Nations?

Douglas: Time. And also that the Soviet Union was in the United Nations.

Fry: And held a veto in the Security Council?

Douglas: Exactly. But there were other ways that it could have been raised, in the Assembly, and anyway, we would know where we were. There was always that danger, but we still had to live in the world, if we don't have a last catastrophic war with the Soviet Union, we've got to start somewhere. Working in a new pattern of understanding! Now if we were frightened of them, they were frightened of us. You know, this idea that we are the only ones that are concerned, we are the only ones who don't want to die, we are the only ones who don't want something to happen to us, it is so false. It is so perfectly blind.

Fry: Well, at that time there were some articles coming out that our foreign policy was changing to one of reaction, that we had lost our initiative.

Douglas: We did.

Fry: After this we were reacting to Russian--

Douglas: We did. I was alone then in saying that with the Turkish bill and the Truman Doctrine, we lost our way. Historians are now beginning to say it, looking back and saying it. I don't have my words in front of me here. I will send you the Blue Book; you will see my statement in that. Which is hard, what I said. (I don't think my amendments are in the Blue Book.*)

Again and again, all the books--you read Gavin's book on the military, you know--it takes fifteen minutes for the nuclear weapon to arrive here or in the Soviet Union, fifteen minutes, for heaven's

*This was the mimeographed voting and legislative record of Helen Gahagan Douglas that her staff prepared for use in the campaign of 1950. "Helen Gahagan Douglas versus Richard Nixon. Here is the Full Record of Their Votes in Congress." August 20, 1950. A copy is in the Paul Taylor papers, on deposit with The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

Douglas: sake! We live with this. How people can live with this--they are above our heads, they are under the ground, they have got buttons that will get pushed and it is madness--the whole thing is absolute madness. Absolute madness. And here we are, our economy is in a disastrous condition, right now. We go ahead and pour more and more money into this military arms race and the Russians are doing the same. It doesn't make any more sense for them than it does for us.

Fry: Well, at that time did you have any indications that anybody else was able to see the obsolescence of war?

Douglas: Oh, yes. Every nation agreed to this. Go back and read. This is not something only I was saying. First of all, even before the atom bomb was dropped, before President Roosevelt's death, the western powers, our allies, we all agreed that war in the foreseeable future was a thing of the past. We couldn't continue to have war.

World War II had been so destructive even before the atomic bomb was dropped, so horribly destructive, that anybody could see that no side could win in a war. In the past, many benefits really came from war--inventions, breakthroughs, medicine; there were gains. Land was gained and trade routes were gained, investments, control of one kind of another, markets. But after World War I and then after World War II, it was nonproductive for anyone but the munitions manufacturers.

Fry: And yet there didn't seem to be many things that happened to create a more cooperative structure in which nations could relate to each other and iron out their differences, outside of the creation of the United Nations. Very slowly we do have the Common Market and things like this that are happening. But at this time, between 1945 and the Korean War in 1950, did you feel that there was any indication at all that an alternative type of foreign policy was going to evolve?

Douglas: You mean here in this country?

Fry: Here in this country. One that would take into account that we had to cooperate and we couldn't fight anymore.

Douglas: Well, there has continuously been a body of public opinion centered in universities, in organizations, in the United Nations Association, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, other such organizations--Sane Nuclear Policy Committee--that has understood that we need to work for total disarmament under international controls and the World Court, or we are going to end up in the last terrible holocaust.

Fry: We sometimes interview people who are active in those organizations, and I wonder how you, sitting in your "congressperson's" office, would receive pressure from them. Could you give some indication of how effective they were?

Douglas: That grew up after. There wasn't much of that before '50. The main activity was from the scientists themselves.

Remember, the first session of the United Nations was in this country. The first half of it was held in England, the second half was in this country, and President Truman appointed me to that as an alternate delegate and I served on the economic and social committee with Adlai Stevenson. Then we began joining after that the specialized agencies of the United Nations.

The support for that was widespread throughout the country. Women came--every women's organization practically in the country came to my committee, testifying in favor of the various specialized agencies. And then really the Sane Nuclear Policy Committee--that is Norman Cousins-- I have forgotten the exact date that that was organized, but it was later. It was after the arms race had started really. This all came later. It began in the middle of the '50s.

Fry: Now the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom--

Douglas: Jane Addams--

Fry: --had been going for quite some time.

Douglas: Certainly had. Well, it started in World War I.

Fry: Did you see many signs of them in the halls of Congress?

Douglas: Yes, oh yes. They came and testified with everybody else during that period before I left--in that period between '46 and '50.

Fry: There was one called People's Mandate to End War.

Douglas: I don't remember that.

Fry: Would you like to go on to your next topic?

A State of Israel in Palestine

Douglas: Well, as I told you earlier, Melvyn and I went around the world in 1932 and arrived back in Los Angeles just in time to give birth to my first child. I was tremendously impressed with Palestine.

Douglas: Melvyn's father was Jewish, his family lived in Russia, and he was sent over here when he was nineteen. He was a "wonder child," he was a very fine pianist and composer, and he was sent over here to escape the military that would ruin his hands. Melvyn's mother was a southern lady, born in the Deep South.

When we visited Palestine in 1932, it was accidental--We were in Egypt on our way through the Red Sea, but my trunks had not arrived, and so instead we went over to Palestine. I was so impressed with what the Jews were doing there on the land, and we visited the kibbutzim that were there at the time. The Jewish Agency heard we were there and they took us around, and I was so impressed that from that time on, I supported what they were doing. We had been in Egypt and we had seen the land there, had gone out on the land.

Remember this continuing interest of mine in the land and how people live on it, the belief that I have that you have to have a healthy condition on the land with the farmers to have a country that is healthy. How people live is all-important--the quality of life is all-important. And the suffering that I saw in Egypt was so very great, and I was so impressed with the difference in the way people lived there and in Palestine, where I saw what was done for the children and the old people, the way people worked in those kibbutzim.

Now when I went to Congress, Senator Bob Wagner was head of the American Christian Palestine Committee, and I became his co-chairman. Before I went to Congress, when I was national committee-woman and state vice-chairman, I had worked to try to save the Jews in that period. We held certain meetings and--I have forgotten now just what it was but I was active, and that is why when I went to Congress I became co-chairman with Senator Wagner, the mayor's father. A dear man.

Fry: Was this a congressional committee?

Douglas: Yes. I was swamped for time, trying to get any help also outside the Congress for Jews. I had hoped for and exerted what influence I had in the recognition of Israel as a country.

Fry: I picked up on public statement of yours from May 22, 1947, urging U.S. support of new Israel and I wondered if you could tell us anything at all about the opposition, those who were opposing it. Was it oil?

Douglas: I don't know. Oil certainly played a role all the way through, it is still playing a role, it is still playing a major role in our foreign policy. I know that the State Department--well, [Secretary of State] Dean Acheson was opposed to it.

Fry: To which?

Douglas: To the recognition of Israel as a separate state. I had luncheon with him when he expressed his opposition very emphatically.

Fry: What reasons did he give you?

Douglas: Well, I would rather not relate it.

Fry: Oh, put it down and put it under seal.

Douglas: Well, he said the Jews had always caused trouble in the world. I was a close friend of Dean Acheson.

I thought of someone you might interview. It might be interesting to learn a little of my work on the Foreign Affairs Committee. It is Tony Freeman, Ambassador Freeman, who now heads the language school in Monterey. He was reminding me just now in Carmel, where he and his wife live, that when he appeared before the Foreign Affairs Committee with Dean Acheson (he had just come back from Italy, I think), he was attacked by some Republican members on the committee, and how I came to his rescue. And he told me that Dean, when they left, turned to him and said, "Wasn't she wonderful? Wasn't she wonderful? The way she did that so diplomatically and got the questioning back on the track."

I have just tried to pick pieces which you can find out about, you know.

Truman went against everybody in the State Department when he recognized Israel. That is the story that went out. The State Department didn't know that he was going to do it. He didn't inform them, he just did it. I left Washington that day--flying to New York City to meet Melvyn--thinking that Truman was not going to recognize Israel. (We weren't the first, I have forgotten what country was the first to recognize Israel. I think we were the second country to do so.) I was very disappointed, you know, that Truman hadn't acted.

But by the time I got to New York, it had happened. It had happened during the flight. We were staying in New York at the Plaza Hotel. I met Melvyn outside the Plaza and there was this little cabbie and on one side of his cab there was an Israeli flag and on the other side, a United States flag. It was a very touching and proud expression of support for Israel.

Fry: The war between Israel and her Arab neighbors raged in 1948. That is the one that Ralph Bunche settled, and I was wondering if you were involved in that, both at the United Nations and on the Foreign Relations Committee?

Douglas: No. That didn't come before us in either, no.

Fry: Now the question of arms to Palestine did come up in Congress.

Douglas: And I was in favor of it.

Fry: Could you tell me anything more about what you did?

Douglas: Well, they were alone, and I thought that nobody else would give them arms and that they had to have some for protection, not for aggression, but for protection.

Fry: And I think we did give them arms.

The Marshall Plan

[This material appears in the videotaped interview of April 20, 1973]

Fry: One of the most significant pieces of legislation to come through the Foreign Affairs Committee was the Marshall Plan, Point Four.

Douglas: I helped write the Marshall Plan, and in this sense, it was an administration bill, the bill that was presented to the committee. Then we had public hearings, then we had the hearings from people in the House who wanted to testify, other members of Congress. And then we closed the door, and we started to read the bill--we did this on every bill--clerk reads the bill, every line, and any member wanting to amend the bill is able to do so at any point in the reading of the bill.

During the writing of the amending of that bill, getting the bill through the committee, the process of reading the bill which took months and months and months, we had to get special permission not only to sit in the morning but the afternoon as well. Sitting with us were certain top lawyers from the State Department at all times, sitting in the corner. (One of them I met the other day who now is teaching, head of a big law firm or part of a big law firm, Ernie Gross, just before I left New York at a United Nations gathering.)

During the reading of that bill, there weren't more of us during those endless weeks than four, five or six people that sat, out of that entire committee, whenever it was in session. The rest of them would go away and they would be called. I used to go and call Sol Bloom's office the minute a vote was up on a special amendment that we didn't want on the bill. It was left to me and

Douglas: to Judge Keyes who was chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee for a while, to determine when an amendment was not desirable. And then I would go call Sol Bloom and say, "Sol, vote's up. We have (so many) minutes to get the members of the committee in here to vote." And week after week after week that is the way we worked on the Marshall Plan. And some very distinguished gentlemen were not sitting there day after day after day.

One of the men who did sit there day after day after day on the Republican side was John Vorys of Ohio. And Vorys and I were always on opposite sides--well, not always, but we were usually on opposite sides of every issue and at the end of the final day's work on the bill, we voted it out, it was going to be printed, Vorys came up to me. He put out his hand and said, "Well, Helen, I admire you, I respect you. You do your work." Because he was there every day and I was there every day and Judge Keyes was there every day, an old, old man, never missed a session. I remember Vorys very well; I remember Judge Keyes very well. The three of us were there at all times.

Fry: It was a marvel that that bill got through at all in those days.

Douglas: It is a marvel that it got through without being amended in such a way that it didn't become a bill for special interests. This is what we were fighting all the time.

Fry: Which special interest?

Douglas: Every special interest you can think of. A member of the committee would come in and stay just long enough to present a special interest amendment for some business concern that wanted to have special consideration in the recovery of Europe. But it was a good bill that came out, the final bill, a very good bill.

I think a statement of mine, as I remember on the floor, was a correct statement. I warned, when we brought it to the floor, that it was a mistake to present it as an anti-Communist measure; that if there had been no such thing as communism, we still would have wanted to aid Europe in the reconstruction that was essential, if we were to have a United Nations.

The devastation was so vast throughout Europe that it was absolutely essential that we give--we were the only people that could give assistance where needed, we were the only people that could give it. Actually, you know, initially it was offered to the Russians. And they turned it down.

Fry: Was there ever a debate on whether this would be offered to the Iron Curtain countries too, the Russian satellites?

Douglas: Not when it came to the floor. No.

Fry: The historians who write on the subject say that it was the Communist seizure of Czechoslovakia that actually helped put this through on the floor.

Douglas: The argument was that. I think you should see--I have forgotten who it was who mentioned that, whether it was Tugwell or Larry Hewes, in one of their books, but the gist of it was that you couldn't get through the Congress needed legislation without scaring them to death. Vandenberg I think said that to Truman. "If you want to get this through, you have got to scare them to death." (I have forgotten who told me this exactly.) "Wolf, wolf, wolf," when there isn't a wolf.

Communism was a fact. There was no question that they would like the world to be Communist, just as we wanted the world to be free, but that wasn't the way to get through measures, posing them as ones that were really designed only as fighting communism. The Marshall Plan was the decent thing to do. It was what had to be done if there was to be a United Nations that in truth was united, and where the devastations that World War II had caused were corrected.

Fry: So we have this Communist paranoia that was just beginning to build.

Douglas: And it was used as an argument, an oversimplified argument for anything you wanted to get done, including the defeating of anyone you wanted to defeat. And this is very bad because it meant that in this particular period in which we live, a new period in the history of man where a new power exists in the world [the atom bomb], we needed instead to carry on an essential education program. We had to educate ourselves and help educate others where we were informed of certain facts. We had to catch up with the changes that science and technology are creating in the world.

And it had to be continuous; it has to be continuous today. Our conditions are changing hourly. You know, what was true five hours ago isn't true now and won't be true five hours from now. The changes are just happening before us as if it were a film going by our eyes, and to be sidetracked with some simplistic explanation for everything that we were doing or wanted to do was undermining our own strength, our own position.

Fry: And ignoring the importance of this educational process that had to take place after the atom bomb was dropped.

Douglas: Right. And I think one of the reasons for our getting off the track again and again was because the White House didn't educate as much as it was necessary for the White House to educate--all the way through, Republicans and Democrats. There should have been more programs directed toward a greater understanding of the issue.

At that point they thought people couldn't understand; it was all too complicated. I think the issues can be simplified so that enough understanding can be widespread to give support for sensible programs. Anyway, that is the only way I know how to function in any public program--study it myself and then discuss it as intelligently as possible, to have people understand it and then reject it or accept it.

The 1948 Elections

Fry: In the 1948 Democratic Convention, Helen, can you give us anything about the negotiations, and attempts before the convention started, on getting somebody in there besides Truman? At this point Eisenhower was a definite possibility. Nobody knew what party--

Douglas: I don't think Eisenhower belonged to a party. A few people were talking about him at the convention as a possible candidate but not anyone on our delegation except for Jimmy Roosevelt, who was in favor of Eisenhower's candidacy.

Do you remember by any chance, the general's address in the early months following the end of the war? He was very impressive in his address to the entire Congress. I think the members of both houses of Congress were impressed.

And then a number of Senators were as concerned as I was lest Harry Truman fail to measure up as a president. But that was in the early days of the administration.

Fry: You were not for Truman?

Douglas: I was for Truman.

Fry: Oh, I picked up somewhere in my notes that you, also, were for Eisenhower on the train to the convention.

Douglas: No, no, no. This is quite wrong. It was Jimmy who was trying to gather strength on the train for Eisenhower. I was opposed to that. Very much opposed to it.

- Fry: This was after the Truman Doctrine, and a number of people were against Truman because of his actions in Greece and Turkey; you had been against him for that.
- Douglas: I had been against the doctrine, I had been against the doctrine, yes; because it bypassed the U.N.
- Fry: But not Truman?
- Douglas: I had come to have considerable respect for President Truman, although I think there were mistakes in his administration, besides the decision to handle Greece and Turkey as we did. I think the abrupt cutting off of lend-lease was a mistake. I don't think it should have been done in that way, and I think cutting off of UNNRA as we did was a grievous error in judgment. I think that again was an indication, you know, that we were going to run affairs our way, alone if necessary, rather than acting as one of the nations of the world. True, we were helping disproportionately, but we hadn't been hurt as had other nations, and well, I think it was a mistake.
- Fry: Well, I thought you opposed him, too, when we dropped OPA, the Office of Price Administration price controls.
- Douglas: Yes, I opposed it. But I still was for Truman at that convention. I had thought when Truman first became president that perhaps Eisenhower might be a possible candidate, but one interview with Eisenhower changed my mind.
- Fry: When did you talk to him?
- Douglas: Very shortly after he returned to the U.S. at the end of the European war. I can't really place the date of it. There were a number of Senators with whom I met occasionally. All of us were worried about Truman in the early days--including Chet Holifield. The Senators and I agreed that Chet and I should see General Eisenhower and ask him if he was a Democrat or a Republican, that's all. I think he said he didn't know and he didn't know where he would end up. And so, we just talked generally; we didn't ask, "Will you be our candidate?" or anything like that. We discussed various roles in government and various federal programs. After we talked to him for a very short time, it became apparent that General Eisenhower was ignorant of how the U.S. government worked.
- I looked at Chet and he looked at me, knowingly. After a short visit with the general, we thanked him and said we were happy to have had the opportunity to talk with him and left.

Douglas: On our way back to Congress, Chet and I agreed that the general really didn't know anything about government. [laughter] I so reported to the Senators, and all thought of Eisenhower as a possible candidate for the presidency was dropped.

That's all there was to it. Anything that happened after that was Jimmy Roosevelt's doing.

Fry: During that convention, were you at all a part of the battle for the vice-presidency?

Douglas: No, I wasn't but there was a delegation who wanted to propose my name as a candidate for vice-president. The delegation asked to see me. I sent word I was doing the last work on my address to the convention and so I couldn't see them. I thought it was silly, you know, just ridiculous.

Then Miss Chavoor came to me (who was head of my office) and said, "This is serious, Helen. You have got to talk to these young people who are out here. They have got this campaign started to make you vice-president." And then some other people from Washington came in, friends of mine, rather powerful people, and said, "That is it, Helen, we are going to press this." That was before Barkley's name had been brought up at all.

So I said, "Oh, really, I am working on this speech, leave me alone. Whatever you want to do, do it, but just leave me alone." And then Barkley's name was mentioned and I sent out word, "Please stop whatever you are doing, stop it, because Barkley is obviously the person who is right to be vice-president and it is just nonsense. Why go ahead just to put my name up on the floor? This is nonsense, it takes the time of the convention; it wouldn't go anywhere." I was rather touched, though, because this particular delegation with this ridiculous plan (I can't think of the state from which they came) was made up largely of young people.

Fry: Was it largely of women?

Douglas: No, men and women.

Fry: This was also the time of the third party, Wallace's third party. How did you stand in relation to Wallace and to the Independent Progressives?

Douglas: Well, I always admired Wallace. I admired his agricultural programs and I admired the programs that had been carried out when he had been secretary of agriculture. You know, people have forgotten, but Wallace, next to President Roosevelt, commanded the largest audiences of anybody in the country at that time. People just

Douglas: flocked to hear him, though he was the worst speaker that ever stood on a platform. He was just so long-winded and really dull. But he was very attractive to people.

After President Roosevelt's death and Harry Truman became president (well, before that, in the campaign), Wallace, though he was passed over, was very generous and very wholehearted in his efforts to elect Harry Truman. He campaigned throughout the country and one believed then that he had gotten over his heartache, whatever it was, in being passed over by Roosevelt.

When President Roosevelt died and Harry Truman was president, he was appointed secretary of commerce. There were those in the Senate and in the House who admired him very greatly. There were those of us who met with Wallace for a short period of time when he was secretary of commerce, maybe once a month, always on a Sunday, for dinner. We would meet early and leave early, you know. Meet at six o'clock and leave at nine. And we would discuss issues that were up in the Congress. The only two from the House who came were Chet Holifield and me, and the rest were all Senators. We always met at the Cosmos Club in a private dining room.

One particular evening, discussion was going on about the coming convention, and after some discussion Henry Wallace said, "I think I will try for the nomination." He was discouraged by those at the table because they didn't think that he could possibly make it, that he ought to wait. He said, "Well, I don't know. It has been proposed that there is the real possibility of my attaining the nomination and of my heading a third party."

There was dead silence around the table to Wallace's statement, and the conversation kind of went downhill after that. There was no particular response to this third party. It was just dropped like a hot potato in the middle of the table and there it was. And so, very shortly after, the Senators rose and we all rose and were about to leave the room, and they shook hands with Henry Wallace and they went out.

I stayed behind and Chet stayed with me, and I turned to Chet and I said, "Aren't we going to tell him, aren't we going to tell him that there isn't anybody in this room who will support him for a third party? We can't go out letting him think that anybody will support him for third party that was here, any of his old friends." And he said, "Well, I think we should say so." And I said, "Well, I certainly am going to."

And I went up and I said, "You know, Mr. Secretary, I don't believe anybody here will support you for third party. I won't." And then Chet told him that he wouldn't. And that was the end of

- Douglas: our meeting, and that was before the third party, quite a while before the third party. Maybe six months, eight months, a year, I don't know. A long time before. But he was thinking about it and I am always glad that we made it clear to him. I thought it would be disastrous for Wallace.
- Fry: 1948 was an off-year election for you back in your own congressional district, and according to some of the newspaper accounts that I read, he had come out in support of you for re-election on October 1.
- Douglas: Forty-eight? Henry Wallace?
- Fry: At least his party--the Independent Progressive party had.
- Douglas: In '48?
- Fry: Yes. And the next day you made the statement that you had not sought this endorsement and you didn't desire it. So I wondered what was going on in your own election campaign, because this must have been a very sticky problem to handle.
- Douglas: No, it wasn't. I was opposed, you know (contrary to Mr. Richard Nixon's allegations later) I was opposed to Communist support right from the beginning in the field. This is why a person such as [Philip] Connelly, who was chairman of the Industrial Union Council [CIO] in Los Angeles, fought me tooth and nail. They were far left and they were opposed to the foreign policy that I supported.
- Fry: In your own campaign, was it a problem to you, the potential loss of votes that might have been given to the IPP, or did you not have that competition?
- Douglas: I don't think so. You see my votes increased each time and I didn't--we didn't function that way. I just came home and talked about what I had been doing, what the issues were, what I thought ought to be done, and that was that.
- Fry: [reading from notes] They had tried to get you to run on both Democratic and Third Party tickets, which you could do in California at that time. The Southern California chairman was Harper Polson of the Independent Progressive party. Remember him?
- Douglas: No, I don't.
- Fry: You won the Republican nomination, too, only there was a recount demanded by the Republican opponent, whose name was Braden. Do you remember that recount business?
- Douglas: No, I have forgotten it.

Fry: He demanded a recount--this was on the primary, of course.

Douglas: Oh, yes. I vaguely remember now.

Fry: Was this the one that you didn't come home and campaign for?

Douglas: No, that was '46; I was at the United Nations.

Fry: But this one, you did campaign for?

Douglas: Yes.

Fry: It is apparent from the campaign literature in your campaign that you used campaigns as an educational process, because they are issue-oriented. What other things did you as a congresswoman do to keep people educated both inside your district (the voters) and outside?

Douglas: You know what someone told me the other day in Los Angeles? I was really amused. Al Meyers was always on our side as an adviser; he was a representative of the small business association at the end here, in Los Angeles. He said, "You know, we all make mistakes," looking at me like this, you know, and he said, "I will never forget that when you talked before the North Americans at the North American [Aircraft plant] in Los Angeles when the men were coming out from work. You talked about the 160-acre limitation in the reclamation act." He said, "The only time I ever saw Ed Lybeck absolutely furious, was when he heard that that is what you talked about." To factory workers.

And so Al Meyers looked at me as much as to say, "Well, you see how you behaved. Why should you talk to factory workers about the 160-acre limitation?" I said, "Factory workers, what was I to talk to them about? Labor legislation, they knew all about that, but they didn't know about the 160-acre limitation and they had to know about it if individual farms were going to be saved in the state of California." But I always campaigned that way. It made everybody very nervous.

Fry: What did you send out from your congressional office? Did you have any regular publication?

Douglas: No, I don't think so. I made phonograph records. They must be there in Oklahoma. I recorded. I didn't do it all the time; it seems to me the last few years maybe. There was a period when I would make a weekly radio record. That would be sent out to California and played on some of the stations. I don't even remember what stations they were played on now.

Fry: I hope those are still preserved.

Douglas: I think they are there in Oklahoma.* And I have some of those still in Vermont. Somehow or other they got to Vermont. Great big ones. I think there is one on price controls. Chester Bowles and I met very often at the radio station very early in the morning, about eight o'clock before work would start. He would be making a record on controls, the need for controls, and I would be making a record also on controls that would go back to California and perhaps someplace else.

[End of material from videotape of 20 April 1973]

Assessing the Responsibilities and Rewards of the Years in Congress

Douglas: I had a very rich experience in Congress, very rich experience. Anything I did, I can say, in my whole life was rewarding. I was very fortunate in this respect, that everything was rewarding that I undertook, and I never undertook anything really, that I wasn't interested in. In that sense, I was very fortunate not to have to. So, I've always made a difference between myself and other people who had to make certain compromises in order to survive. I didn't have to.

Fry: You didn't have to make the economic--

Douglas: I didn't have to, and I had the security of a family that at any time would have come to my rescue. It gave me the warmth and the security that makes the difference. You're not alone. It makes the big difference. And it made the difference in Congress.

My one consideration of my work in Congress, the one yardstick that I used was: what was the best interest of the country that I was privileged to serve as a member of the Congress. What was the best interest. That was hard enough to figure out without complicating it by thinking, "What is this going to do to me later on?" I never, never, never approached anything from that point of view. Never.

*The phonograph records are in the Helen Gahagan Douglas collection at the University of Oklahoma. Ed.

Douglas: But I don't think that was a question that I was better than somebody else, in any way. I didn't have those pressures to begin with. This was not--it was not something I set out to do, to go to Congress; it came as a result of the period in which we lived. I think one's background is always important in trying to understand why a person behaves in a certain way.

But, in Congress so many bills come before a member of that body, that if you are not just dedicated to your work, you're just following somebody, you're slapping wildly, as many members do. They go to a member on the committee that a given bill has been referred to and they say, "What do you think?" because they trust that member. But it's not really their own research that decides them--because it's very difficult to have the kind of information one should have to vote properly on bills. That's what I always felt. It was quite enough work to be on the Foreign Affairs Committee, though I was very active in housing and very active in the other vital issues that came before the House of Representatives.

Fry: Did you get your prime enjoyment out of being a student of American social and economic needs?

Douglas: Yes, yes. I tell you what I had found about myself: my mind has to do. It's a mill; it's working. For instance, from the time the atomic bomb was dropped, I thought that war, as an instrument of foreign policy, had become obsolete. And I have followed since that time, through studies, the development of the arms race.

And for me, this is essential, I find. I have to be really working at something. For instance, it was fulfilling for me to have an opera score in front of me that I had to absorb; I had to get the music. I wasn't that good a musician! I had music from the time I was a child, you know. Piano was something I had used, had worked with, had studied, but I wasn't a fine musician at all. I couldn't do what Elizabeth Rethberg could do, sit down at the piano and play, not as well as Mme. Cehanovska, but she just played her own accompaniments, and she could just sit there for hours and do her own work.

For instance, Arpad Sandor was my accompanist up until he died. I returned to singing after 1951 until he died. I was singing very often just for my own enjoyment. He told me about the many times when he had worked with her. One concert that he was going to give with her, he was going to accompany her, and he came to her apartment or her house, and she said, "Just sit over there in the chair, and I'll play my concert, and then you can see the way I like to be accompanied." So she sat at her piano and played her own concert, and she never worked with him at all.

Douglas: I was not that kind. That was the kind of musician that Mme. Cehanovska was.

Fry: Competent on the instrument so that--

Douglas: More than competent! At one with the instrument. Now, I had a certain competence with the instrument, but I was not at one with the instrument. So it was a challenge.

So, everything I did was rewarding and absorbing, but as I say, I never give myself more credit than I deserve for stands that were considered to be courageous, because I didn't have considerations pulling me in another direction. I didn't have a voice saying to me, "What's going to happen to your children? How are you going to live if something happens to you, and what is your future going to be?"

Fry: Were you accused of being naive, when you ignored the political effects of a stand that you took?

Douglas: I think you have to ask other people about that. I think that's what you--

Fry: [laughing] Okay, I'll take a poll.

Douglas: I'll tell you a story which is interesting. Now, we're jumping-- this is now 1950, and this is after the primary in California for the Senate. I had won the Democratic nomination, and Richard Nixon had won the Republican nomination. We both returned to the House of Representatives, and I remember [Sam] Rayburn said to me when I went into the chamber my first day back, and I went up to the Speaker's desk to greet him, "Helen, I'm so glad that you won the primary."

And Richard Nixon was sitting in front of us. And he said, "Now, don't make any mistake. Take that young man out in the finals." He said, "That face is the--" And I have forgotten the exact word, so I wouldn't like it to go on the record, but he said "the wickedest?"--I can't think that Rayburn would use the word "evil," but it was a face that was not to be trusted. Whatever the exact word was, it was a face that was not to be trusted. And in that sense, it was the worst face that ever sat before him in the House of Representatives. That was a very strong statement. Rayburn, of course, was Speaker of the House.

Also after the primary, the McCarran Act came before us. It had to do with rearrangement of rules that govern civil liberties, and so forth. The vote came up for it, and my delegation, the California delegation, the Democrats, were around my chair, and one of the men leaned down and said to me, "Helen, we urge you not

Douglas: to vote against this bill." Richard Nixon was sitting opposite on the other side of the House, because the Republicans sat at that time on the left of the Speaker, and the Democrats on the right of the Speaker. And he had a number of key Republicans around where he was sitting, and they were looking at me, watching to see what I would do, what was happening on the other side of the House. And Nixon had this smile on his face.

And the California Democrats said, "Look at him. He's just waiting for you to vote against this bill, Helen!" I said, "But I cannot vote for this bill. I have taken Downey out of the race, who was a reasonably good Senator, except for his continuous attack upon the reclamation program that is a major plank in the Democratic party program. I cannot in any way vote for this program. It would be immoral for me to betray the constituents who are supporting me now on the issue of reclamation, on the issue I so deeply believe in, in order to get to the Senate. I'm to betray the constituents before I get to the Senate? Downey betrayed them after he got to the Senate; I'm to betray them before I get to the Senate? Impossible!" And they said, "Helen, you can never get around fast enough. You won't have the money. He'll beat your brains in with this bill."

I said, "I can't help what he does. I know what I have to do here." And I voted "no."

So then, I left shortly after that and went downstairs to have luncheon, and John McCormack and a group of other liberal congressmen were already in the private dining room where only congressmen can eat. He was sitting at the corner table, and so I went to that table, because I sat with him always there in that group. One of the congressmen from New York rose and said, "Welcome. How does it feel to be a dead statesman? It feels fine to be a live politician."

So this was the attitude of many men who voted certain ways because they calculated that vote would be misunderstood back home. They were afraid the McCarran Act would be misunderstood because people would say you were "soft on communism." Well, I was not afraid of anything anybody would say about me. What I was afraid of was making a mistake and voting into law something that would change the kind of government we had that I had been brought up to understand! I understood what our liberties were about. It was discussed in our house. This was a heritage that I had that was very clear to me. And furthermore, the kind of discussions that went on in our house--remember, it was a Republican house, but it was a liberal Republican house--were the kind that prepared me for this kind of stand!

Fry: In the area of civil rights--what we would call race relations--was there discussion of this?

Douglas: Civil rights--you're talking about blacks, minorities--yes.

Fry: As well as civil liberties.

Douglas: I have had to deal with legislation on communism and subversive activities. Yes, go on--

Fry: I wondered if you can remember things in your childhood, issues that had come up in connection with your father's business, in which he had to make decisions on equal employment opportunities, or anything like this.

Douglas: No, I never heard that, no. That was new.

Fry: What experiences did you have with blacks?

Douglas: I had none. I was totally unprepared.

Fry: You were a clean slate when you grew up?

Douglas: A clean slate, yes. I didn't have prejudices. I wasn't brought up in a house with violent prejudices. However, Mother had slight, very gentle prejudices, I think, against Catholics and Jews. Father's partner was a Jew--Alfred Liebmann was a Jew. Her prejudices were very slight, very slight, nothing. But I wouldn't say that it was wholly clean, that slate.

Father's was. I never heard Father say--Father had none of this, absolutely none, nothing whatsoever. And there was never a discussion. Mother never in her statements said, "Oh well, because they are Catholic," or something. It's just she didn't feel comfortable with them. Well, she never felt comfortable with Democrats. Never. Of course, she never voted for Richard Nixon for vice-president, because of her daughter and all. And she thought that it was fine that I was in the Democratic party so they'd know what a very decent person was like. [laughter] She was conditioned, you see, by the Tammany history in New York, And she thought everything worked that way--the stories about Tammany and the corruption.

Fry: The bossism.

Douglas: Exactly, exactly.

So I use that as an illustration. I did not have pre-formed answers. I only tried to think through the issues and arrive at a sane conclusion.

Fry: Women's suffrage was passed when you were about twenty years old, and I wondered if you at that time were politically conscious.

Douglas: I was not at all. Mother was.

Fry: She was?

Douglas: Oh yes, very. She didn't go out in the street, she didn't wave banners, but she believed women should vote, and they should organize themselves. She belonged to clubs--study clubs.

Oh, that was something I wanted to say: remember I told you that Mother saw to it that we had tutors every summer, but we also had dancing lessons at home, and we also had Shakespeare lessons at home, and she belonged to a Shakespeare club. And she believed in women voting, passionately for voting. And she took us by the ear when it was time for us to vote, and we went and voted. You could never miss a vote. She never missed a vote. That was part of your responsibility. It was not something to be taken lightly.

IV THE 1950 SENATORIAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST RICHARD M. NIXON

General Campaign Observations

Douglas: And you know, I have always believed that it was necessary for those who could be absolutely free of personal considerations in their work in the Congress not to try to protect the office for themselves. Because we must have some people who could be used as a yardstick, and in a small way, I think I have. I think that's one of the reasons the 1950 campaign is remembered. My record was known in the eastern part of the country. It could not be misrepresented there. It was misrepresented out here in the West because we couldn't get around the state fast enough. It wasn't misrepresented in my district--couldn't be misrepresented in my district. And if it hadn't been for the Korean War, perhaps the outcome might have been different.

I personally believe that Richard Nixon might well have won that campaign even without the campaign of character assassination and misrepresentation of my record, without smearing himself. I think the fact that I was appointed by President Truman to the United Nations, that I believed in world cooperation--I said we have to learn to live with other peoples in the world or we will all die together. I warned against the arms race in the early, early days, against the Greek-Turkish bill, which I think we should go into in detail because it has so much to do with what developed afterwards.

It was the Greek-Turkish bill where the premise of my opposition was: that we at that point decided to turn our backs on the United Nations without saying we were doing it and taking affairs into our own hands, working unilaterally, and that we were willing to support any government even if it was indifferent to the needs of the people, if they were against communism. And I didn't think that was good enough for us, for the kind of people we thought we were, that we thought we had been, that we hoped we would be in the future. I thought it was a betrayal of what we stood for.

Douglas: I don't know where I left off--

Fry: You felt that Nixon could have won the campaign without smearing you.

Douglas: That's right, that's right.

When the Korean War came in the Pacific, the West Coast was emotionally upset, more so than anywhere else in the country. You remember the really neurotic fear of people on the coast of being close to Asia. Remember how it was with Pearl Harbor.

Fry: You mean the removal of the Japanese?

Douglas: Yes, the fear that we were close to it, that we were exposed to that part of the world. And when the Korean War came, it suddenly was--you know--"We have the United Nations, she's been for the United Nations, and it doesn't work! We're back at war again."

And one of the approaches that was made by Richard Nixon in the campaign was to point out to people whom he talked to that a certain young boy would still be fighting over in Asia if the Democrats stayed in office. If this woman was sent to the Senate, we'd still be fighting it. It was very contradictory, what he was saying, but that didn't make any difference. He said certain things to certain audiences.

So, he might have won without the smear. There are others in the campaign--talk to Florence Reynolds (she'll certainly say so)--who'll say, "He never could have beaten you, never in the whole world, unless he carried the kind of campaign that he carried on. Never!" So, that's simply my own thinking--that the outcome might not have been different. Who knows. It certainly has plagued him. I have not contributed to the fact that the '50 campaign is still pointed to. I have not contributed to that. I have not spoken about the '50 campaign on platforms. I've campaigned nationally in presidential elections since then, but I've always talked about the program before us and the issues.

And the reason that I haven't talked about the '50 campaign-- I think I told you this when you first came in and we were talking about it, but I think it's good to get it on the tape. Being national committeewoman and state vice-chairman for four years, from '40 to '44, being instrumental in helping to elect in 1942-- I think it was six--new Democratic congressmen, all liberals, to the California delegation to the House of Representatives (I think that's the number; it's easy enough to check); having been instrumental in building the strength of women in the state to the point where, in the selection of possible candidates for Democratic

Douglas: offices, the men had to listen to us--they had to listen to us; I had been working very closely with candidates. I was in a position, therefore, to see what happened to some candidates who were defeated, and the sorry sight they made when the defeat destroyed them as people--as people.

Fry: The disappointment of it, you mean?

Douglas: The disappointment. The failure became a personal failure; I think it is wrong for candidates to feel that way. I mean, in our system I don't believe it's just one or two people who are qualified in any given district to serve in the Congress. I think there are any number of people who are qualified to serve. We don't always pick those people; we don't pick the people that are best qualified. But there are any number of people. It doesn't mean because you're doing a good job in Congress that no one can adequately follow you and also do a good job in the Congress.

The country isn't lost irrevocably when certain persons in Congress are defeated. That's against our whole system. It's totalitarian. It hasn't to do with our system, which I believe, deeply, is the best system that has evolved so far. It has faults; it's not perfect. But it's the best that's been evolved.

And therefore, it always saddened me to see how failure to succeed in winning in an election can destroy some people. But I was objective enough, having come through the '50 campaign and quite a different campaign than I had expected or than I'd been subjected to before--although it had been pretty rough, too, in the days when I was running for the House of Representatives. They hadn't been easy campaigns, but they weren't the same as the '50 campaign. In the '50 campaign, when our car went through with our stickers on it, children threw rocks at the car.

Fry: That happened to you?

Douglas: Yes, in '50. They threw rocks at the car. The kind of abuse that one took was so obvious, you know, that you wondered, is this a democratic election, or are we in a war, an undeclared war?

I didn't know how I would feel when I woke up the morning after the election. I thought, "All right, you've been saddened when you see what happened to other defeated candidates. What's going to happen to you?" I didn't ponder--I didn't stay awake thinking about it.

When I woke up free, uninjured, whole, I was prayerfully thankful, because it could have been otherwise.

Douglas: I never had any need to explain to people, "I really am a loyal citizen. I'm really not pro-Communist." I have not done that. Again, I can't take credit for not talking about the '50 campaign, when I had no urge to do so. I had done the best job I could do in the Congress. I was not ashamed of my record. In fact, I think it was a remarkably good record. I know I was respected back there, by my colleagues and by people who were aware of what was going on in the Congress. I had made the race for reasons that were proper: I had made the race to save the reclamation program.

The Reclamation Issue

Douglas: Senator Downey was doing harm to the reclamation program, making the kind of day-to-day attack upon the Reclamation Bureau in the Department of the Interior that McCarthy made upon the State Department in later years. And I felt this was detrimental to the whole West Coast. Someone had to make that race.

I wasn't eager, particularly, to go to the Senate. Had I been thinking of my own career, I would certainly have waited two years, if it had been going to the Senate that I wanted--because I was offered it for 1952 by Bill Malone and other powerful, political men who didn't work in the final campaign--who certainly were Downey supporters. They may not have hurt me, but they certainly didn't work for me in the campaign, and without their work we were in trouble in various parts of the state.

So, nobody was urging me. Of course, the Interior Department was very pleased if anybody would take on Downey, you know. But nobody really was saying, "Helen, you've got to run." California Democrats wanted me to wait for two years. They promised me, "Helen, if you'll wait for two years and run against a Republican for the Senate, you'll have the entire support of the state."

But I said, "That's not the issue. I don't care if I never go to the Senate. But I don't see how all of you can sit back and let our own Democratic Senator destroy a program that is essential to the well-being of the West Coast. We have to conserve our water. We must have a yardstick in power.

"We must continue to have a land where people live, where there are homes, schools, a community, where there are churches, where there's community life and support. We don't want vast areas of land where no one lives, where you just raise food, and then you truck people in, a migrant people in this new land of great riches--where the children don't go to school, they live under impossible

Douglas: conditions, they don't have health treatment, they work at low wages. You truck them in for work in the fields for a short season, and then you truck them out again. This is not the land we thought we were settling here! It's not the kind of world that we envisioned for ourselves, in our particular part of the world! And someone has to take Downey on."

So, I ran for the Senate.

So that when I woke up the next morning after the election, I was satisfied with what I'd done. I certainly stopped for the time being that attack on the reclamation program, because there were others in the Congress as well as myself who were protecting that program. Jackson of the state of Washington was one of them. Another man who was protecting it brilliantly was John Rankin, whom I opposed again and again and again in the Congress on the issue of civil rights for blacks. But when it came to reclamation, we would stand on the floor together and fight together to save the program.

So, I was satisfied the morning afterwards, so I've never felt a compulsion to--talk about Nixon and say what he did in the '50 campaign. I wanted to forget it. It was unpleasant; I wanted to forget it.

And I tell you, really, that were he today a great president-- (I don't believe he is. I think our situation in Southeast Asia today is the blackest page in our history, and I do not believe we're out of there. I don't think as of now that we have any intention of getting out of Southeast Asia. And I think his performance in other respects is not for the good of the country). But were he a great president, I would say it's immaterial--even what he did to me in the '50 campaign. He did nothing to me, but the kind of campaign he waged in '50, and the kind of campaign he consistently waged--against Adlai, what he said about Dean Acheson --the quotes are all there in any number of books that can be found. Against Harry Truman.

It was a technique that was used consistently. And I have always believed that one reverts to habit under stress. The habit was set up in Richard Nixon, the formation of a habit of a technique of campaigning, a design as to how you go about winning a campaign. It was established for him in the race against Jerry Voorhis, in 1946, to destroy the opponent and avoid issues. That campaign was his first.

It is believed by those who've made a study of comparable campaigns in the country in 1950 that it was a technique that was used against Senator Claude Pepper in Florida, who was defeated in

Douglas: the primary by Smathers, who became the Democratic Senator. And it was a technique that was used against Dr. Frank Graham of North Carolina, president of the University of North Carolina who then went to the United Nations. (He died just a short time ago.)

And this pattern, this technique, I think, is the reason that those around Nixon behaved as they did when they invaded the Democratic party headquarters--the Watergate--the way they campaigned against other candidates, the way the FBI was used. It's a pattern, and under stress one reverts to the pattern.

Fry: When things look like they're going badly--

Douglas: Yes, you revert to what your habit is, the way it's worked before, even if you don't want to and you want to work another way. You get frightened and you revert to a certain habit.

So I had a habit. My habit was to try to figure out the best I could what was right. And that was quite enough, to tell you the truth, to occupy my forces. Having figured out what was right, I never worried what was going to happen to me, or what the results would be. And that was really well enough ingrained in me that when I woke up the day after the election, I was free, and that's why I was free. I think that's why I always was able to sleep well at night. I never stayed awake thinking about what somebody was going to say about me or said about me.

I was distressed that people around me were hurt, which they were in the campaign.

Fry: You mean your campaign workers?

Douglas: Not my workers--people who supported me, you know.

For instance, the night of the election there was a vintner (I can't remember his name) around the Bakersfield-Fresno area someplace, a large vintner. And he called down, "Don't concede, don't concede." Well, anyway, no need to give that little conversation. But he had pressure put on him, you see, and direct pressure to make it difficult for him to negotiate the kind of loans that he'd made for his work. Business pressure. Well, this is not unknown, this is not unique to the state of California. This has happened in other states. Pressure is brought to bear to bring people over to the other side.

There is another reason I say that I think maybe Nixon would have won anyway. One has to remember that the reason that Downey, I think, resigned and didn't run the race was that they took the poll and discovered that I had him defeated after one speech. He

Douglas: made a statewide broadcast on radio, and I made one, and a poll was taken, on the issue of reclamation. Now, I had talked that all over the state--what we had to have, why the 160-acre limitation was essential, why public power was essential--not that one wanted to have only public power in the country at all, but you had to have public power as a yardstick to judge the cost of private power.

I talked about why the rivers had to be developed scientifically, not just capriciously developed for the short range profit of individuals, but the rivers had to be taken as a resource that belonged to everybody and had to be developed for the good of the whole region; that we were going to be an expanding population and we dared not be careless about our natural resources, we dared not be profligate in the handling of our natural resources, and we dared not be shortsighted.

Well, so I had against me in the campaign and knew I would have against me the Associated Farmers, who wanted to defeat the 160-acre limitation on land they could buy that had been irrigated by federal monies, buy water that was brought to the land as a result of federal programs of development of the canals. You've been through the state, you've seen the canals and the artificial lakes and reservoirs that have been formed, and these great cement canals that bring down the water, and then the tributaries from those canals that bring the water to the farms. So, I had against me the Associated Farmers, which was different from individual farmers. The Associated Farmers urged members of Congress to amend the Reclamation Act limiting ownership of land federally irrigated.

They also were opposed to me because of the work that I had been doing with the migrants. I had been a supporter of unionization of migrants, and I had supported, before that, the Farm Security program of the Roosevelt administration. And many of the big farmers were opposed to the Farm Security camps. I was in support of the whole agricultural program, and many of them disapproved of it.

I was also in support of the Brannan plan. Brannan was secretary of agriculture at the time and introduced an agricultural program that for me made sense. I don't think we'd be in the position we're in today, where the taxpayer pays twice for their food, if we'd adopted the Brannan plan. (Another time we'll go into that. Let's not digress for a moment.)

Fry: The big farmers were against the Brannan plan, is that right?

Douglas: Some of them were, yes. The Farmers Union was for the Brannan Plan, and the Associated Farmers were against it.

Douglas: Now, let me digress for a second in the subject that I still feel so strongly about and so much a part of, that reclamation program. You see, that was my interest as national committeewoman, too. And on my way to Congress the first time around, I visited the David Lilienthals. I stayed at their house, with some friends, to be taken through the Tennessee Valley, because I hadn't seen some of those TVA dams.

Also, I went on another trip--this is before the primary in 1950--as I remember. Dr. Paul Taylor will set the date for you perhaps more exactly than I will.* Maybe I'll be more exact than he is at this point, I don't know. At any rate, he and his wife, Dorothea Lange, and I went through the Central Valley in a study tour. We went in his car, went through from Northern California down to Bakersfield, and all through the reclamation area there. The car was filled with books, with pads such as you're writing on, notebooks, names, and we visited the program in California, studied it at night, talked about it, and so forth. We met farmers, small farmers, big farmers, talked with reclamation people as we came down, on the power program, talked with some assemblymen that were working in this field, and so forth.

We came down to a town that had suffered severely from the drought. It had been one of the richer citrus producing areas, and they had suffered so from drought that the fact of water coming into this area was to them lifesaving. It ensured their whole livelihood. We came in and we went to visit a man who was the editor and owner of the local newspaper.**

And we walked in to this little newspaper, which had the quality of early early America, you know--one hundred years before--and we went up the steps, and then we came into the office, and it was just one huge room. And there was a low fence dividing the room, and he was sitting at his desk on the inside of the fence. And when he saw us come in, he got up and came out, and he didn't greet Dorothea and he didn't greet Paul; he threw his arms around me and he said, "Oh, my dear, my dear, my dear. Come upstairs with me. Come, let's talk."

* Dr. Taylor remembers the date as mid-1949. Ed.

** Dr. Taylor remembers the town as Dinuba, where they talked to Dinuba Sentinel editor Locke, who had testified for the 160-acre limitation in Congress in 1947. Ed.

Douglas: And we went up an iron staircase to the roof, and he took us to the railing, and we looked down at the expanse of orchards, and he said, "Do you see--do you see that grove out there? Do you see, it's functioning today. And do you know what they were like? They were little hard rocks, the oranges and the lemons." And he said, "When the water came down from the great dam, and the side canals had not yet been built, do you know what happened? The people ran out with buckets, and they cried and they yelled and they sang, and they prayed on their knees, and they took the water and they poured it over their heads. They poured it over their heads." He said, "And you have never seen any such demonstration." And he said, "That's what you're a part of. Thank you, thank you."

And this was an important part of the development, of what happened in the country. Water had been an issue, actually, in California, even while I was in Congress, but only as to who was going to get water from the Colorado River. It was not a question of what you should do with the water in the state. [laughing] You know, as if someone was asking for something outside of their own home, and not taking care of what they have to work with in their own home.

They told me years later when I came back to California, "Well, Helen, because of you nobody can run for county clerk today and not know about water in the state." So in this sense, it was right, at that time, to make the '50 Senate campaign. I'm not saying everything was right as "right" was designed in the Interior Department, but the approach was right.

The basic difference between the Democratic stand on resources and the Republican stand on resources as it pertained to land use and private power, and the development of the rivers, had to do with whether you allow the development to take place in a laissez-faire manner, letting each person work his will on it, or whether there had to be some overall plan within which private enterprise functions.

It wasn't that I wanted to turn the whole thing over to the federal government. That was never my stand. But there had to be some overall plan. It didn't mean the plan was always the best. We've learned a lot from what we've done. We see the mistakes we've made all over the place today. Almost in every way. But there was a difference in the philosophy. Now, it doesn't mean that there were not, in the whole history of reclamation in the country, leaders of greatest ability and concern and dedication who weren't Democrats. There were.

But it does mean a difference in what the party stood for, the way the word would go down in the House of Representatives from the leaders, "The administration program is this," or "the program of

Douglas: the Republicans against the Democrats is this," which was usually "leave it to the private people, and it will work out all right." Well, we see now that it hasn't worked out well.

And it hasn't worked out all right even for the private people. Plants throughout the country today have to undertake reorganization and redesigning of their equipment. It's going to cost them millions and billions of dollars, because businessmen weren't sufficiently farsighted!

Fry: You're talking about power companies?

Douglas: I'm talking about power companies, I'm talking about chemical companies, I'm talking about every industry that pollutes the rivers and the water--misuses the water--and pollutes the air and the earth. It was all short-sighted. But we're all guilty, we're all guilty. And I'm saying only that on the issue having to do with natural resources, I felt so strongly that I had to act.

The study tour with Paul and Dorothea between the primary and final '50 election was one of my richest experiences. Dorothea would point out in the field, where the migrants in those days were working with the long bags slung over their shoulders into which they would put the cotton they were picking, she'd show me the figure, she'd point it out, you know; she'd say, "Look how beautiful the curve of the back is as the worker holds the bag." She saw the workers in the field from the point of view of an artist, with the photographer's eye. It was a very, very rich experience--very rich.

Fry: One photograph in the first page of her book that has come out does exactly that. The outline of the worker in the field repeats the curve of the furrow. It's a beautiful photograph.

Douglas: Oh, I haven't seen that. Yes, yes.

Fry: Did she take some photographs of you we might use in this manuscript?

Douglas: You'll have to ask Paul. I don't think so. She may have taken something of me on that trip. But we do have in the Roosevelt book that I wrote--The Eleanor Roosevelt We Remember--we do have one picture of Mrs. Roosevelt and Melvyn and me at one of the Farm Security camps when we took her through the camps, which would not be bad. Well, we'll see. I have other pictures there.

I think it was [Arnold] Genthe that she worked with--the famous photographer. He photographed me when I first went into the theater, and that has not been used anyplace.

Fry: Do you have it?

Douglas: Yes.

Fry: Oh, let's use that.

Douglas: And I tell you one other thing that you might want to use too. Noguchi, the sculptor, the famous sculptor, did a head of me. You might just want to use it.

Fry: Oh, really? Where is it?

Douglas: It's in my apartment in New York. And you might want to use that. Melvyn says it looks like my grandmother and my great-grandmother. All the Gahagans--even if she wasn't a Gahagan, she was married to a Gahagan, whether she was a Smith or a Cory.

Now, why don't you go on with your questions.

Fry: [laughing] All right.

We did pretty well on that question, I think. In answering that you answered some of these others too. Let's move on to the oil issue.

The Tidelands Oil Issue

Douglas: You remember I was the only member of the California delegation to support the president and the Supreme Court on the issue of tidelands. Did I give this to you before?

Fry: No, not on the tape.

Douglas: I believed that that tidelands bill--well, I believed that the power to issue permits to private companies to drill oil should be given to the federal government rather than to the three states that had oil--Texas, California, and Louisiana.

Fry: Why?

Douglas: Because if there should be corruption in the leasing of oil by the federal government it would be very quickly discovered, much quicker than at the state level. The management of oil leases would be better if it were out of the states, where the direct

Douglas: pressure of the oil men in these states where there was oil off-shore couldn't be brought directly on the state legislatures, and where the state legislatures wouldn't be indebted to these men for money for their campaigns to be re-elected.

Besides that, under President Truman's program, the monies the federal government would receive for the leasing of these oil lands would then be spent for education, to balance educational opportunity throughout the country, so that the poorer states would be getting as much for their education as the richer states.

Now, this is still a problem, as you saw the other day in the Supreme Court decision. Within the states, where there's a rich area and the taxes are higher, that money cannot be spent within that same state for an area that is depressed where the taxes are lower or they have no taxes.

I just don't think you can have a democracy that functions intelligently unless people are educated. Education is fundamental to the sustaining of our democracy. I think today, especially, where mass media is used to subliminally influence people, education has to be widespread to resist it--and I mean education and not just reading and writing. Reading and writing and arithmetic are merely the tools with which one can become educated. One is not educated when they can read, and furthermore, people can "read" and not be able to read. I've known congressmen who read a bill and didn't know what was in it! Not any idea what the implications of the words meant. I've talked to audiences, and then someone would ask a question that showed that he or she hadn't understood a word I'd said! And this is more and more true. There's so much noise and confusion, and where there's so much noise and confusion around us, people can't hear! Much less think.

One of the more subversive influences on our democratic system can be and presently is in the field of education, where there are other influences that so work on one's fears, one's prejudices, that people aren't capable of thinking, can't possibly look at the facts because it makes them afraid to look at the facts. They think somehow if they do, it will jeopardize their capacity to earn a living.

Fry: Were you aware at the time of the patterns of property ownership of the oil companies in California's very large farm holdings?

Douglas: Yes.

Fry: That Standard Oil owned quite a lot of agricultural land in the Kern area, and so forth?*

*See pp. 7669-7670, The Congressional Record, Senate of the United States, May 7, 1959, for charts of land ownership in the San Luis federal service area and Kern County. Ed.

Douglas: Yes, yes. So you see that oil was a very important issue in the '50 campaign. I suspect the majority of Richard Nixon's money came from oil, just as Downey's did. So I had against me the Associated Farmers and they had money. Di Giorgio was the head of the Associated Farmers and led them. Then there were the oil men.

Did I tell you about the two propositions that were made to me, even for this race in the Senate?

Fry: No.

Douglas: Not the two-years-hence promise I told you about, when certain leaders came to me, people like Bill Malone, and said, "Wait two years and we will all support you wholeheartedly, Helen, but for this particular race, no."

Manchester Boddy's paper had always supported me. (Manchester Boddy was a personal friend.) Les [Leslie] Claypool worked for him, I think as head of the political desk, something like that. He phoned me in Washington to say, "I'm coming to Washington, I'd like to see you, Helen, could you possibly have breakfast with me?" I had breakfast with him.

At that breakfast he said to me, "You know, Helen, we think so much of you and admire your work and all, and we want to support you on everything, but you're just wrong on one issue, and that is tidelands. You haven't really studied all the factors involved in why the right to lease oil should be given to the states. All I'm asking you to do is to take these books, with all the information you need to understand why the leases should be given to the state. Please read and study it. That's all." That was one approach that was made to me. Another approach was--

Fry: What did he give you?

Douglas: Well, he gave me all the books the oil companies had prepared to present their point of view. These books were propaganda books, of course, propaganda from their point of view.

So then the other approach that was made to me was by John B. Elliott. John B. Elliot has been a big Democrat. He'd supported President Roosevelt the first time he ran. He'd hoped President Roosevelt, so Franklin Roosevelt told me, would appoint him as secretary of the interior. Franklin Roosevelt would not appoint him as secretary of the interior because he was an oil man. He then worked against Franklin Roosevelt, and every time I would go to Washington and stay at the White House, and Mrs. Roosevelt usually

Douglas: put me next to the president, he would say to me, "How is Black Jack Elliot, Helen?" So that John B. Elliot, who was a very affable man to meet and talk with, was known to the president as using black jack methods, I would say. Otherwise, why call him "Black Jack Elliot?"

He had opposed me from the beginning, which was curious--well, maybe not curious, because in that first race I was running against a number of men, and one man, Mr. Bennett, who was chairman of the Los Angeles city council at that time, was a well-known man politically, and Elliot had every right to think that I shouldn't go to Congress, you know.

But as my work went on, he continued to oppose me. And I thought this was interesting in that Phil Connelly, who was president of the Industrial Union, CIO Council in Los Angeles, who was thought to be a Communist (at least everyone thought he was a Communist) also opposed me.

I told you the first time I ran I was here in California and campaigned. The second time, I did not come back to the state to campaign. I was at the United Nations and didn't return home. And the Republicans put up a black man in opposition to me thinking that then the entire black community would vote for him and not for me, and they'd take the race that way. Well, I was overwhelmingly re-elected. And then the third time John B. Elliot also worked against me, and I was again re-elected with a still bigger majority; I was in the state that time, campaigning.

After that campaign, he called me and said, "Helen, if you can't beat them, you join 'em. I give up. I guess you're the smartest of anybody on the delegation, and I just want to be your friend, and I want to be with you. And to show you that I want to be with you, I want to give a dinner for you. Will you come to dinner?" I said, "Yes, I'll be very happy to come." So he said, "I'm going to invite the press."

So he invited the press, all new to me because I was not that much acquainted with the press throughout the state. And when I came to the dinner, he said, "May I talk to you alone before dinner?" And he took me into a side room, and he said, "Helen, there isn't anything you want politically you can't have. There's only one issue that would prevent my being wholeheartedly in your corner and that is the tidelands issue. You're wrong on it. Now, I'm not asking you to change your vote, I'm only asking you to study the problem." And the same set of books [laughing] was given to me again.

Douglas: I thanked him and went out to the dinner table. After dinner, I made a speech on why I was for the tidelands [bill], and that ended my relationship with J.B. Elliot. The vicious campaign against me was created in J.B. Elliot's office, the campaign against me in support of Downey, the beginning of trying to misrepresent my record in Congress, began in Elliot's office. Richard Nixon's quite right in claiming that. It's absolutely true.

Now, one of the other people J.B. Elliot had with him in this effort was Mrs. Mattison Boyd Jones, the woman who had wanted to be national committeewoman in 1940 and who never forgave me for receiving, without lifting my hand, the majority vote of the delegation at that national convention.

The reason that Boddy was a good choice for the oil companies to run against me in the primary was because his was the one big newspaper which supported me. He was my personal friend. I really had to have some organ like that in the city of Los Angeles where the population was so heavy because the Los Angeles Times was against me. Boddy's paper came all through Southern California. But he could not refuse, we found out later, to run when they urged him to run because he was terribly in debt to the oil companies and to the Hearst newspaper interests.* So it all tied in. And after Downey retired, then he became a lobbyist in Washington for the oil companies, so it was clear.

Another group that was against me in the state (and I didn't realize how bitterly they were opposed to me until the finals) were the lumbermen, because of the bill I introduced to save the redwoods. That bill was written by Gifford Pinchot. He was an old man at the time. It was the last great contribution he made to conservation. And Walter Reuther put up the money they needed in drafting this beautiful bill. I told you about that. That bill would be interesting to compare with what we're doing now, you see, so much of it is the same.

Fry: It would.

Douglas: Because this bill didn't prevent cutting. How shortsighted were the timbermen in opposing it! You see, this really is illustrative of the fact that people really are so fearful, often, of their own position, that they can't think. This in no way was going to penalize the lumbermen. It was going to guarantee that there would

*A nineteen-page telegram from Sheldon Sackett, dated October 31, 1955, is in the Helen Gahagan Douglas papers, University of Oklahoma Library.

Douglas: be continuous cutting for them and also not destroy the redwoods. The cutting was to be done on a scientific basis. It wasn't just cutting that was done without regard to the effect of the cutting, it was to be cut in such a way that there would be a sustained yield, year after year.

I'm trying to think of the other people against me--Associated Farmers, oil, and the private power companies. You can get that from Paul Taylor. The private power companies were violently opposed to me.

Perspectives on the Papers of the Campaign

January 27, 1950 Talk With Truman

Fry: Now that we've both reviewed some of the papers from the campaign, let's approach some of the questions they raise. For instance, that conference you had with President Harry Truman on January 27th. The press picked this up.

Douglas: What year was that?

Fry: The year of the election, 1950, but it was early. You had a White House conference with Truman to talk about a lot of things, and the press said undoubtedly you talked about your running and your candidacy for the Senate.

Douglas: There's some reference to that in here [files of Helen Gahagan Douglas] about a press report on that conference. It had to do with the hospitals out here in California. I visited many of the hospitals that the soldiers were in around Washington, any of the hospitals near the Capitol that I could get to, and throughout California. I was deeply distressed by the number of men who were paraplegics and had to sit in wheelchairs, and they didn't have ramps to go down. I was meeting with them anytime I went to California. I did not tell the press, according to the press reports here, about that. One of the reasons why I didn't was probably that I didn't want the veterans to be led up a primrose path if nothing was going to happen. I was very distressed about them.

I don't remember speaking specifically at all about the '50 campaign with President Truman.

Fry: Do you remember anything he said about Sheridan Downey, whether he wanted Downey to stay in or not?

Douglas: No, definitely no. This was not discussed. I think it was an interview on what was happening at that time.

Catholics

Fry: Another question is in these Xeroxed documents from the campaign.* Your material on Catholic support made me think that the Catholic stand was not all that it should be. You told me off the tape that you did have some problems with Catholics.

Douglas: There is that report of the word that went out from Cardinal McIntyre, you remember, in Los Angeles. I had that before me here. [looking for material] Nothing could be clearer than what's in this letter.** It's a letter to Right Reverend Monsignor Edward V. Wade, 17 November 1950; he wrote this afterwards, but he has included, you see, what had happened before. Mr. Rogan sent me this. (No sense going through that because you have the material here, but this is important.)

As he pointed out, "The Archbishop, J. Francis McIntyre, in an official letter to all Catholic parish priests in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, ordered that for four Sundays of October the sermons to be devoted to the evils of communism with special attention given to the fact that Communists have infiltrated the high governmental positions. He outlined to each parish priest to mention no names at the altar. But each priest was alerted as to which candidates the archbishop desired to be defeated in the November election. Many priests included in their sermons that the woman running for high public office should not be elected."

* Originals in the Helen Gahagan Douglas papers, University of Oklahoma Library.

** A letter from Richard Rogan to Msgr. Edward V. Wade, dated November 17, 1950, and a pamphlet, "A Message to Catholics from Catholics," about Senatorial candidate Douglas, are in the Helen Gahagan Douglas papers, University of Oklahoma Library.

Douglas: Outside many of the churches (not all of them, but many of the Catholic churches) there would be campaign supporters of Richard Nixon. They would be giving out the kind of literature to the parishioners that he was spreading throughout the state about me.

So I think this is an important document to show what happened. Of course I had a very strong Catholic committee.

Fry: Did you put that together after you realized what was going on from the pulpits?

Douglas: No! I think there's a date on that. But it was the Catholics themselves, my supporters, who came to me and said, "Look, this is what is happening in our church. We are outraged."

Fry: What do you think the connection was? Do you have any idea why that program was carried on from the pulpit?

Douglas: Yes. There were certain of my stands of which they disapproved. First of all, they may well have been taken in by Richard Nixon's literature; thousands of people were. But also, I did not approve of our recognizing Franco's administration in Spain after the war. Melvyn and I had supported the Republic of Spain throughout the war. This was enough, because in those last years after the war, when I was in Congress, Catholic priests came very often to the House of Representatives urging recognition of Franco's Spain.

Fry: Did any of them talk to you? Did this become a clear issue of debate?

Douglas: No.

Fry: But they knew your record?

Douglas: Yes, of course. They knew what it was compared to other members. They would approach Catholics.

Fry: What other efforts did you make? Did you tell me that Judge Leonard Dieden attempted to see a Catholic bishop?

Douglas: Frank Chambers can tell you about that--Frank Chambers, the chairman of my northern campaign, a Catholic. Judge Dieden can put you in contact with him. Frank Chambers and I and some others, I've forgotten who they were, went to see the bishop in San Francisco. He said he knew my record. It was a fine record. No one could oppose it. Chambers brought up questions of participation of the Catholic church in the election, to which the bishop replied, "We never participate in any election." And that was the end of it. "I know Mrs. Douglas's record. There is nothing objectionable in Mrs. Douglas's record, nothing whatsoever. But we never participate in an election."

- Douglas: I would think that bishop was a little different from McIntyre down south, but I wasn't sure.
- Fry: Do you think most of this activity was in the south?
- Douglas: I don't know, because I wasn't on the spot enough to know, but certainly in the south the church was very active.
- Fry: Did you get any indication afterwards on the vote--how Catholic districts responded?
- Douglas: No.

Campaign Funds

- Fry: I wonder if you could fill me in on the funding.
- Douglas: [looking at official election report] I'm not sure if what we have here is the primary or the final.

You asked who funded the committee, the Democratic National Committee. I got some money from the state committee. Paul Ziffren raised money in the south, Ellie Heller in the north, but not her husband, and the Macauleys, Captain Macauley and Jean Macauley. Jean Macauley was the honorary chairman of my northern campaign. Sue Lilienthal was acting chairman. Sue and Ernest Lilienthal raised money, motion picture people raised money. I have a list of the actors and directors and producers who raised money. And then there were nickels and dimes from people. Gifford Phillips raised money. You're going to talk to him. Or have you talked to him?

- Fry: Yes, I've talked to him over the telephone.

From other sources I have noted here that your final report (I think this is from newspaper accounts after the election) says that you took in and you spent \$44,257.

- Douglas: Then that is the final.
- Fry: Contrasted to that, Nixon reported spending only \$8,000.
- Douglas: That was a great joke at the time. A great joke. All over the state there were tens of thousands of copies of everything he was putting out from his campaign headquarters. He saturated the state

Douglas: with paid people working on street corners, same as in this last election, you know. People starting little discussions on corners. A friend of mine reminded me of an experience she had in Los Angeles.

Fry: What do you mean?

Douglas: People would be paid to stand on street corners to start discussions with passersby. They would start by handing out literature and then someone would question them, you know: What did they mean by putting out literature like that about Mrs. Douglas? Or, is this true about Mrs. Douglas? And then they would carry on. Their introduction to people was the fact that they stood there with literature in their hand; they were spotted all over the place.

Fry: In the street corner talks, did you get back any report that there were allegations made against you about your being Red?

Douglas: Yes, of course. One day a friend who worked in my campaign in Los Angeles, a friend I've known for years, Mickey Simone, the widow of Dr. Simone, was walking on a street in the more congested area of Los Angeles when one of those young men handing out literature stopped her and started up a conversation. She will tell you personally the story. She told it to me the other day when I was in California.

Fry: Did any of these street corner speakers ever come right out and call you a Communist?

Douglas: No. It depended. You see, it was the hateful atmosphere the Nixon campaign created. Then paid people were influenced by it. But all the materials were there that would lead them to embroider. Yes, of course. It would just depend who it was. If there were people who understood what they were saying, the seriousness of it, and had to be more careful and had to have real proof, then they would be more hesitant in making extreme accusatory statements-- as in any situation.

And there were always the special appeals made to special given groups on the basis of what they needed or thought they needed or wanted in the future. So that special appeal was made, and then it was made to look as though the defeat of Nixon's opponent was necessary if they were going to achieve what they wanted. So in the process of this, hate was generated. I really think that was the ugliest part of the campaign. It was the atmosphere of hate that was created and fanned. It was unhealthy. It was ugly. It made people say and do things that they normally wouldn't.

Douglas: I want to say one more thing about funding. At that time our laws didn't require reporting anything except personal contributions to campaigns. So separate, self-financed committees could be formed in support of a candidate that didn't have to be reported. We, of course, can't document anything about Nixon, but I know that the Jimmy Roosevelt campaign was expecting it would cost about \$1,500,000.

Fry: Do you remember if you managed to take in any more than \$44,257? Or were all of the other expenses above that just throwing you in the red?

Douglas: I was in the red when the campaign was over. It was very touching when the final figures were in. I had several calls from around the state from people who had formerly contributed to the campaign who said, "Helen, we're going to send you a contribution to help defray the debt."

They knew we were in the red. I made speeches for the next two or three years, lectures around the country, which paid off every cent of the debt. And then dear Melvyn paid the income tax on the money I made from the lectures!

But there were some special committees. There always are. A women's group might get out a special letter to their friends, at their own expense. This goes on, and you can't keep track of it really.

The obvious support of Richard Nixon was from the oil people and the Associated Farmers led by DiGiorgio, all the people who, in the rural areas, opposed the 160-acre limitation on federally irrigated lands. The oil companies were ever-present, with all the Nixon billboards which plastered the state.

Fry: Would you like to mention this letter on Judge Charles Wyzanski's story to his nephew, David Wintell, on Kennedy's support for Nixon?

Douglas: Wintell is a writer, a researcher. He wanted to write a play about the '50 campaign, as he said in a letter. I wasn't very enthusiastic about it. Anyway, it never materialized because of his other work. So then he sent me information about his uncle. His uncle had said in the letter that John Kennedy had contributed to Nixon's campaign. And when asked why he had done that (he knew him apparently) what was his statement? "I was the biggest damn fool that ever was." Or some such thing.

Fry: You told me the other day that you thought perhaps this was the influence of Joe Kennedy.

Douglas: No, he said that, in the letter. I didn't have any reason to know it was the influence of Joe Kennedy.

Fry: Did either Kennedy contribute to your campaign too?

Douglas: No. I don't presume to say why people do things. And then, this kind of conversation went on all the time.

Fry: What kind of conversation?

Douglas: The kind of conversation that Nixon literature promoted in the campaign. It is the same technique in this [1972] election. He tries to avoid discussing the issues. That's the basis of his campaign. He doesn't want to discuss the issues because he may lose some votes. He wants to obscure the issues and he doesn't want to be tied down to issues except when he would talk to private groups. Private campaigning, as it were, where private groups are going to give him money, or give anyone money in a campaign.

Fry: I wanted you to tell me all you know about the other persons in his campaign, like Bernie Brennan, Murray Chotiner.

Tactics Versus Issues

Douglas: I didn't know them. I can't be of any help. But people in California can, such as Al Meyers, people like that. You remember that I was carrying a very heavy schedule in Congress right up to '51 and all through the campaign. I was flying back and forth from Washington to California, and I was writing what I had to say. They knew my record and knew the way I wanted things done, but I didn't have time to check over even the literature that went out. Impossible. There simply wasn't the time.

Fry: Your literature?

Douglas: Yes. Generally, I'd say we're going to do this, or I won't do this. Chotiner's name began to come out in the campaign because of his close connection with Nixon. But most of that really came out afterwards as far as I was concerned. Other people in my campaign were gathering information around the state. They were exposed to it daily. I really wasn't.

What I felt in the campaign was the change in the atmosphere throughout the state. It was unhealthy, a kind of hate developed which was ludicrous. It didn't have anything to do with the campaign. Issues weren't being discussed; I mean, the people weren't discussing the issues. It was just, "That woman mustn't go to Congress. Who knows what will happen if she goes!" That

Douglas: was the basis of the campaign. And it worked. And, of course, the war in Korea helped it work.

Fry: As early as May 9th there is a speech that you made in which you say, "We know every Democrat will be called a Communist." That confuses me because there's also a story in a secondary source that says that on September 26th, which was much later, you sent out telegrams to your friends and in some alarm said, come we must talk about this new threat, because Nixon had just made his first speech in the general election campaign. I wonder if you can straighten out at what point you realized what type of campaign it would be.

Douglas: We were prepared from the beginning for Nixon's type of campaign. We had a good example of it in the Voorhis campaign. We had the record of what he had done in Congress, the way he behaved and what he said, what his preoccupation was, his drive for publicity, attention getting. He was the saviour. He was going to protect everyone from Communists.

So we knew perfectly that this was going to be his campaign. And knew, just as in Jerry's case, that it would be a campaign designed to obscure the issues, to destroy the opponent so the issues weren't essential; it didn't make any difference what the issues were, you had to so undermine the character of your opponent that the dread would be the election of that opponent. He did that with Jerry, and we knew he would do it with me, knew he would do it with me.

But our strategy continued to be what it had always been. I discussed the issues. I notice one letter in here that I wrote to Bea Stern. I sent her some Nixon material and said, "Don't say I sent it," because my stand was never to recognize it, not to talk about it even. Now that didn't mean we didn't send out some literature with his congressional votes, but we didn't answer his daily campaign tricks. (I read the material last night.)

Reaction to the Nixon Tactics

Douglas: We were affected by it, as I look back twenty-five years later, no question about it. Perhaps we should have had a different approach to it, not been so above-it-all and just pointing to the record all the time. I don't mean responding in kind. I wouldn't have done that. And I wouldn't have falsified as he was prone to do and did. Winning isn't everything. I always believed campaigns had to be a time of education for the voter and for the candidate. Otherwise you're stealing votes from those you're asking to give you their support.

- Fry: You and Melvyn both made a rather defensive statement about your good citizenship.
- Douglas: Exactly. That's just what I mean. This shows that we were disturbed and that the campaign was mounting to such a pitch that we couldn't just go along ignoring the tactics that were being used.
- Fry: Was there an attack against Melvyn that I've missed?
- Douglas: There was a certain kind of whispering campaign. I'd been told that the Nixon campaign was saying that he was Jewish. They had a whispering campaign to this effect: He had changed his name. Melvyn did change his name, as I told you. It was Hesselberg, Melvyn Hesselberg. His maternal grandmother's name was Douglas. And the reason he changed it was because William A. Brady said, "You can't put Hesselberg on the marquee, it's too long." So then he became so famous.
- Years later, after we were married, I said, "Look, we can't go on like this. The children have one name, we've got another, and I'm known as Helen Gahagan. We've got three names in this family." So then it was that we legally changed to Douglas, which was his maternal grandmother's name. His mother's name was just as bad. Her family name was Shackelford, which is a very distinguished southern name, but just as awkward as Hesselberg.
- Fry: Is Melvyn a Jew?
- Douglas: Yes, his father, not his mother. (His father married his mother here in this country.)
- Fry: What I'm thinking about is that in this marvelous big, blue-covered record here, a full record of all your votes in Congress,* (it's certainly going to be a Bible for anybody who studies your life) I notice that on the amendment to the Displaced Persons Act you voted against an amendment that would limit immigration of Jews and another minority group. You voted against that amendment, and Nixon voted for it. I guess you brought that out in your campaign?
- Douglas: I don't recall. I pulled out from here a file I must have made which was duplicated some place, of a speech. I made it in '45 before Congress when I came back showing my concern over the new age in which

*"Helen Gahagan Douglas versus Richard Nixon. Here is the full Record of Their Votes in Congress." Prepared by campaign staff, August 20, 1950 (mimeographed).

Douglas: we lived. I'll just read this so you can get an idea what it is. The date is October 4, 1945. I said, "Mr. Speaker, mixed with my feelings of elation on August 14th that we come finally to the end of the war, the beginnings of which I saw myself in China in 1932, was a feeling of stupefaction.

"I realized that we had come to an end of one age and that we were witnessing the birth of another because of the smashing of the atom and the release of atomic energy. Now I know that it is true. We cannot retrace our steps, whether we like it or not. This new age demands of us an entirely new concept of our responsibilities toward one another. These responsibilities must be based fundamentally on a fully Christian, moral attitude. Now, more than ever before, is the time for all of us to read our Bible to live by the principles found within the Golden Book.

"When I returned to Congress this fall, I wondered if we would begin where we had left off, as if nothing had happened, or would we demonstrate to the world that we did understand that a new age had begun. Would we act accordingly? Would we live up to our responsibilities? Will we realize that the first order of business of this Congress and the peoples of the world is the question of the survival of mankind." And that has been my preoccupation ever since.

The housekeeping issue that I was always involved in was just that of a good housekeeper. I didn't think it was good housekeeping to have the wealthy center of a city surrounded by slums where children didn't have proper schools. These were the people who were going to vote, going to run the country in the future. We must educate them or we will have a third of the people uneducated. Impossible. How can democracy survive under those conditions? Really, as the strains and stresses of the age would begin to multiply, as I'm sure they will, there will have to be radical adjustments.

War is no longer feasible as an instrument of foreign policy. No matter how many weapons we have, they can't guarantee our security. How many billions have we spent on weapons since the end of World War II? We're in the trillions now, and we have less security than we had at the end of the war. The Russians will keep up with us. If we're ever so foolish as to use nuclear weapons, it will be over, our little experiment on this planet.

Why are we making ourselves poorer? Why are the people of the world making themselves poorer? Why are the Russians making themselves poorer by building ever more complicated and sophisticated weapons? To keep up with us.

Those are the sorts of problems to talk about in a campaign.

Fry: Do you think you made enough of the fact that on your voting record it was true that Democrats (and Marcantonio) did have similar records on domestic issues, whereas Nixon's record on foreign policy matched Marcantonio, where communism was the most vulnerable point.

Douglas: I did not make enough of it. I didn't, really. The statement I finally gave to the Scripps Howard paper in '56, I must have simplified that statement before then so people could understand. Why I didn't go on the air and say it right at the beginning I will never know, except that one is working so hard and so fast, and we worked with limited funds and a limited number of people in our campaign. And I had taken out after all the special interests in the state. I didn't overlook one of them.

I should have said at the beginning, "There isn't any Marcantonio program. This is a lie. This is a deliberate lie to give the impression that there is a Marcantonio program, and that I'm voting along with Marcantonio. There is no such thing."

There was a Democratic program or a Republican program, depending on which party was in power, whether we had a Republican Congress or a Democratic Congress. And there were some members who didn't belong to either party, and who had to vote with the Democrats or the Republicans. Marcantonio voted with the Democrats on domestic issues and with the Republicans on foreign policy. The Republicans jumped the line; sometimes Republicans voted with their own party on foreign policy, sometimes they jumped over and were with us. And now and then some of our group jumped over and voted with the Republicans. But that's the only two ways they could vote.

Fry: This is complicated to explain to an electorate.

Douglas: I don't think it is the way I finally put it.

Fry: Yes, you do have it very succinctly.

Douglas: It took me many years afterward to make a statement people could understand. The only reason that I ever thought about it was that people kept asking for statements. And when I did, it was at the behest of Mrs. Roosevelt. They knew my record thoroughly back East. The newspapers were always covering me. They knew what a scurrilous campaign it was in California. They knew specifically why it was a scurrilous campaign. As I told you before, my record was probably better known around the country than it was throughout the state of California, because there I never had the press with me except for Manchester Boddy's paper.

- Douglas: Downey bowed out of the campaign and Manchester Boddy apparently was told to get in because he was in debt to the oil companies. That's why the Sackett telegram is so important.*
- Fry: Yes. Did you have any indication at the time that the Hearst interests were supporting Boddy's paper?
- Douglas: No. I had no indication nor information about the fact that he was in debt to Hearst and to the oil companies, two million dollars. Remember what Sackett said in his telegram.
- Fry: That came a long time afterwards, that telegram.
- Douglas: I know. Sackett just sent it on and said, "Helen, I thought you would be interested in this telegram." And he, of course, was supporting me. He had newspapers up and down the coast.
- Fry: Did he have any in California?
- Douglas: No. I thought I remembered that he contributed to the Pacifica radio, but apparently I'm mistaken on that. Or maybe he did. He had a lot of money. He may have given them money. Anyway, he supported my position on oil, and thought it was exactly the way it should be handled. The statement of Downey on oil really was so far from the truth of the way it was.
- Fry: There is an interesting little note from Paul Taylor, I think, in which he reminds you that back in 1944 Boddy's paper had come out with this beautiful editorial on behalf of the acreage limitation. Do you remember whether you used that in your primary campaign?
- Douglas: Probably not.
- Fry: I don't know whether you saw it or not, but I saw it in Oklahoma (and I may have failed to Xerox it, because it was a little involved) in which Nixon sent out some material that was labeled, "Dear Fellow Democrats." And the way the frank was on the envelope, they were able to determine where he got his mailing list. Were you able to make a big issue out of this? It seems from this point that that would be a very vulnerable spot at which to attack Nixon.
- Douglas: I tell you. We didn't answer the Nixon ploys. It's hard to believe, but we didn't. Anything that I have in my campaign you can see. We did point out his vote against aid to Korea. At that time that vote was very important or seemed to be very important. We made a lot of that.

*A telegram from Sheldon Sackett, dated October 31, 1955, is in the Helen Gahagan Douglas papers, University of Oklahoma Library.

Douglas: You know, every day something was put out by Nixon. Something would come from some part of the state. If we had answered we would have done nothing but what he wanted us to do, which was to be put on the defensive. As I read through the campaign materials last night, we were put on the defensive a little bit, but not very much when you think of the kind of campaign it was. The reason why those letters went out from Melvyn and myself on citizenship at the end of the campaign, our own supporters said, "We have to have something!" They were being so pressed.

Comparison With Other Nixon Campaigns

Douglas: You know, Millie Logan said something to me the other day when we were in San Francisco. (Melvyn and I had lunch with Millie and Bea Stern.) She looked at me a moment and she said, "You know, Helen, you're the only one who got through unscathed."

Fry: Did you come through unscathed? You know what someone told me? India Edwards [Vice-President, Democratic National Committee] told me that Nixon did destroy you, politically. She said she had asked someone why couldn't they get an appointment for you afterwards, and she said you couldn't be appointed to a dog catcher then.

Douglas: Well, that's good; you should have that in the record. But Millie Logan didn't mean "destroy me politically." She wasn't talking about that. She [meant] destroy me as a person. I was "the only one who came through unscathed" personally, because the others, you know, didn't.

At this time, today, everybody says, "Oh, she must be so happy, jumping up and down to think that Nixon is getting this" [Watergate investigation]. I don't feel a bit happy.

I have a sense that that same unhealthy atmosphere was created in Jerry Voorhis's campaign, in my campaign, in the campaign against Adlai. It was the same thing all over again. This unhealthy--

Fry: Sickness?

Douglas: Yes, I suppose, sickness, real sickness.

Fry: You're referring to Watergate now?

Douglas: I'm talking of Watergate, everything that was done around that, the rifling of the Ellsberg doctor's [office], the money that was donated to him that was not declared, this hidden supply of money

Douglas: that allowed them to do the kind of spying that they did, the letter that was written on Muskie's letterhead about Hubert [Humphrey] and Jackson.

You know, the newspapers really did a superb job ferreting all this out.

Fry: That's a big difference.

Douglas: It is the difference. We just had two or three little sheets in the whole state of California supporting us in 1950.

Fry: What other differences do you see in the present material that is coming out on this recent election as a result of the Watergate investigation?

Douglas: The funds accepted from those who wanted special consideration, the ITT, milk. Maybe milk should have gone up, but this wasn't the way to do it, using the Justice Department. Not having any sense of what is proper, what one dare not do, what one dare not do in public life, such as using the FBI, the appointments that were made, the appointments that he tried to make to the Court. They were so cheap.

Here's another piece that I picked up here today trying to get things straightened for you a little bit. I was campaigning later in Boston for Adlai. I made a statement there that I didn't think he [Nixon] was qualified to be president. He has never seemed to me to be a man who had a sense, a real sense of the needs of the country. He manipulates according to what seems advantageous for him at a given time, and he apparently is so obsessed with winning that any means are acceptable.

Fry: Did you tell me last month in San Francisco whether or not you thought that the Nixon camp was getting inside information on your campaign or anything like that?

Douglas: Yes, I think again in Los Angeles, but that is not too uncommon, really. The Nixon campaign refined everything as in '72. Their spies really became spies. It wasn't just somebody going in and saying, "What kind of a campaign is it? What kind of literature are you putting out?" That's really quite acceptable. But for a Nixon worker to be there and try to be in on conferences and then report back, that's a different level of spying, which is what happened in Watergate. You have to ask some of those in California. I just know that there were people working in the offices.

Moves on the Douglas Side

- Fry: I want to ask you about a piece of campaign literature that has Dr. Gabriel Segall's name on it.
- Douglas: He was our physician.
- Fry: He was?
- Douglas: Yes. He's dead now.
- Fry: His name is on one of the most outspoken pieces of campaign literature that you have.
- Douglas: Really?
- Fry: Yes. I'll describe it to you. Maybe you saw it as you went through these Xeroxes. He says, "Citizens, beware! Un-American tactics are being used which bear a strange resemblance to the propaganda of Herr Goebbels, aping Nazi methods. Enemies stoop to Hitlerian tactics while Helen's husband serves in U.S. Army." It's also signed by other people.
- Douglas: I'll tell you who will tell you about those names in great detail. Go to see Harriet again, Harriet Von Breton.
- Fry: Was this used in the '50 campaign? It was in the '50 campaign folder with all the other materials.
- Douglas: I'm only confused where it says, "while husband serves overseas," because Melvyn had come back by 1950.
- Fry: It sounds like maybe it was in your second congressional campaign, or maybe your first.
- Douglas: No. They put out ugly stuff from the beginning, nothing like Nixon. His is refined, scientifically designed, these campaigns.
- Fry: Except you came up against a team of expert wreckers.
- Douglas: They had all the money with which to work. Drew Pearson came out with a list of special interest people supporting Nixon and also a long answer to the scurrilous pink sheet. There's also available in Oklahoma a record of one of Elmer Davis's speeches in my defense. It would be nice to have that just because of his voice.
- Fry: I wanted to ask you if Drew Pearson had an interview with you, or how did he--

Douglas: What he did to gather material? His men covered the Congress every day. He also came out very often to California. He didn't have any interview with me. But we were friends, though I often turned down one of his men when they wanted information on an executive session in the Foreign Affairs Committee, what went on in committee. He'd say, "Oh, come on, Helen." I would say, "I'm sorry, but it was an executive session."

Fry: There's another defense which perhaps you've used. Here you criticized the irresponsible methods of McCarthy. But this was May 26th, which was in the primaries. You announced that you "will introduce legislation in the near future creating the Citizen's Commission on Un-American Activities." The head was to be former President Herbert Hoover and Eleanor Roosevelt. What happened to that?

Douglas: Well, we had the primaries and then the finals. There wasn't any space in between. Maybe I introduced that. I'll have to look at the bills to see. It was hard to get it together.

Fry: I think you were back in Congress a little while in August.

Douglas: Yes, but not long enough to get a bill together. I was very disturbed always by the Committee on Un-American Activities before I went to Congress, when I went to Congress, and since. I disapproved of it. I don't think the body that makes the laws has the right to question the thinking of our people and their standards and what they believe in. That's not democracy. You don't have to pass the purity test. If something is done that is truly subversive, truly subversive (not the way they kick that word around, Nixon and McCarthy, Mundt, and some of the others) we have the Justice Department and that's where it should be handled.

You see again the breaking down of the division of power, which is very dangerous. We see now what is happening, the division of power between the executive and the Congress has become smeared, as it were. You can't tell who is where and who should do what, the average person can't tell who should do what between the Court and the Congress, and the Justice Department. It's just not good.

Forcing an Earl Warren Endorsement of Nixon

Fry: There is a story that Chotiner gave to the man who wrote a biography of Earl Warren, Leo Katcher. Chotiner told him of how they sent Young Republicans around to heckle you. First of all, Chotiner

Fry: had tried to get Governor Warren to come out for Nixon. Warren, running an independent campaign, would not do this. They kept trying and kept trying, and one of the techniques that they used was to send some Young Republican workers around on your lecture circuit and ask you questions from the audience, "Will you come out for James Roosevelt?" on the theory that if you gave a statement of support for James Roosevelt, then Warren would be forced to make a statement for Nixon.

Douglas: I gave a statement of support. I never tried to cover up in any way. Of course I wanted Roosevelt to be elected; there's no mystery about that. Roosevelt very often seemed to be avoiding getting too close to me for fear that I would cost him votes, and then toward the end when our campaign was healthier than his, then there was a little change. You know, when his mother, Eleanor Roosevelt, came out, she campaigned for both of us and we were together, so we couldn't be separated. It was ridiculous.

Fry: Was this a formal slate form of endorsement?

Douglas: That was never asked. But you see, we were both campaigning. For instance, the party would put out a sheet with: Man running for Governor, Lady running for the Senate, et cetera, and then congressman down below. You didn't have to have an endorsement. We were on platforms together. I'm just saying that there was just a general kind of feeling that Jimmy just wanted to go on his own; he didn't want to be with anybody.

Fry: Let me read this paragraph. Katcher writes:

"But the Nixon forces refused to give up. Joe Holt [the Young Republican] was omnipresent at meetings, street rallies, and press conferences. Each time he would demand that Mrs. Douglas name the candidate whom she was supporting for governor.

"For weeks Mrs. Douglas withstood the constant needling. But a campaign that was tearing Mrs. Douglas and her reputation to shreds finally broke her down. It was apparent that her nerves were frayed and that she was close to collapse. Four days before election, Holt once again threw his poisoned dart at her at a San Diego press conference. She had no resistance left.

"Tears welling in her eyes, she said, 'I hope and pray Roosevelt will be the next governor and he will be if Democrats vote the Democratic ticket.'"*

*Leo Katcher, Earl Warren: A Political Biography (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), p. 261.

Douglas: It could have been I didn't answer the Republicans--I'm trying to think back on the campaign. I say it could have been in order not to hurt Jimmy, because I liked Jimmy; we were friends. Certainly I didn't want to hurt him, and remember, the campaign against me on the part of Richard Nixon was catching fire. So I may have thought, when the questions were put by the hecklers, that they were trying to hurt him somehow. It could well be. Because it was never a question of my breaking. This was our slate, so it was a ridiculous question. I knew they wanted something in asking the question. I knew they were after something else.

By that time I was a little gun shy, when I knew that these were the Nixon people asking these questions. You could tell right away, the tone of their voice, the expression of their face. You could spot them instantly. So I just may have wondered what they were after. I know I wondered on other occasions.

Fry: Since Warren was running a bipartisan campaign, did you ever try to get his endorsement?

Douglas: No. Because this was our slate. I think I told you before that I believe that Chief Justice Warren was one of the great justices that we'd had on the Supreme Court, one of the very great ones. But I didn't really think that way about him when he was governor. I had the impression that he talked liberal and then that his men in the assembly didn't follow through, very often. Except on housing; he was very good on that. Aside from that, I don't know. Now I'll have to rethink all of that again in view of his service on the Court.

Fry: You were in Washington most of the time he was governor. He was governor for two years before you went to Congress.

Douglas: Yes, but then I knew his record before that in the state. I was national committeewoman.

I didn't make that kind of approach in campaigning.

Fry: What do you mean?

Douglas: I mean I wouldn't have thought of going to the man who was running on the Republican ticket for the office of governor and ask for his endorsement when my friend, the man on the Democratic ticket, was Jimmy Roosevelt. It is inconceivable.

Well, we have that down for the record.

Roosevelt Name-Dropping by Nixon

Douglas: Now that I think about it--you asked me what techniques the opposition, headed by Richard Nixon, came to my notice, and I told you that I was moving so fast throughout the state that I was not aware of the campaign being waged on the Republican side for Richard Nixon as much as those who were supporting me.

Since the Watergate investigation has brought out so many facts about this recent campaign, certain incidents have come to mind that I had forgotten. For instance, one of the few times, in fact, I think it was the second time that Richard Nixon and I were together on the same platform, was in San Francisco at the Commonwealth Club. He spoke first, and he held up a telegram in his hand and read from the telegram which he said was an endorsement from Eleanor Roosevelt!

Of course I was shocked because Eleanor Roosevelt had endorsed me and we were friends. And I was discomfited, which was the whole purpose of the telegram, of course. And I couldn't understand it, I couldn't understand how anybody would lie about such a matter as an endorsement. I was bewildered, and he certainly threw me off-base that evening, no question about it. The audience roared when he read the telegram. I suppose many were Republicans and they just thought that was lovely.

Fry: Did they believe him, that it was Eleanor?

Douglas: I don't know whether they believed him or not. I only know I was discomfited, I really was. If I had been faster in my reaction and not so shocked, I would have asked what Eleanor Roosevelt, who was the Eleanor Roosevelt from whom he had the telegram, and was it Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt. I didn't think, I was just absolutely-- he achieved his purpose and I was in shock.

I am not sure whether Mrs. Longworth, Teddy Roosevelt's daughter, was ever called anything but Alice Longworth, whether she was ever called Alice Roosevelt, because the telegram was sent from Long Island, I don't recall at the moment, Oyster Bay or Oyster someplace else. Anyway, there may be someone who was at that meeting who could throw some light on it, but I thought it was interesting. There was no explanation beyond the reading of the telegram and the impression was left--

Fry: He never explained--

Douglas: No, no. There was just the telegram, and he went on to make another statement. He succeeded in having a laugh at the beginning of his

Douglas: speech and they were with him and it seemed to put me in a ridiculous position. It seemed to me so reminiscent, so like many of the things that happened in his last campaign.

And then there is no question but that there were hecklers as I spoke about the state. Not all the time, but very often hecklers. And we know now that this was a regular part of this campaign and undoubtedly--I won't say undoubtedly, but since I never had had this kind of experience in any other campaign, not speaking for someone else or for myself when I ran--it is highly suspicious that they were also paid; they were paid in recent presidential elections to harrass the speaker and to--

Fry: Do you remember if there was a pattern to the heckling? Was it all on the Communist issue, something like that?

Douglas: As I remember it, it was supporting the flyers they were putting out. It would support the flyers.

Fry: Your voting record on Marcantonio's "program"--

Douglas: Well, I don't remember just what the wording of the flyers were-- no, it wasn't that. They didn't put it as blatantly as that, because then they knew, you know, that I would answer that, and they would be killed. No, no, there was no "Marcantonio program." But I really don't recall enough now except that I had the impression that it was always to buttress whatever they were after at the moment.

Democrats and the Campaign

Fry: I want to ask you about some of the Democrats who worked so hard against you in the primaries: George Creel was one. And E. George Luckey. He was an Imperial County landowner.

Douglas: That's right. Luckey and I were friends always before that. When I was national committeewoman and statewide chairman, we were friends. But then when I made such an issue of reclamation, as time went on, it got to him, and probably the oil issue too; but Luckey was not with me, I don't think.

And Creel, I knew; I was in his house for luncheon just before I boarded the train for Chicago to attend the '40 convention when I was elected national committeewoman. Creel urged me to allow my name to be presented. He wanted to see me the next national committeewoman.

Douglas: Creel couldn't forgive me for challenging Downey and the fact that I did ended his support. He supported Downey and was for Boddy, I'm sure in the primary. I don't know what he did in the finals, but I would think he wasn't active. Many of those men who were for Downey and were very annoyed with me for running, for knocking Downey out of the race, were neutral.

For instance, there's an endorsement here from Bill Malone where he says, "I truly do support Helen Douglas and want her to be elected." I'm sure that was true of Bill at the end, but I'm also sure he didn't work very hard in the finals. They wanted their man in the Senate. Bill Malone had had too many discussions with me when I wouldn't agree to the way he wanted things to go.

Fry: His lack of support in the general election is something that's a little difficult to document in papers.

Douglas: Frank Chambers may be able to help you.

Fry: The Tenney Committee in California had listed you as a "Communist appeaser" the year before. I didn't come across any references to this in the campaign by Nixon. I may have missed something, so I wondered if you remembered anything.

Douglas: The Tenney committee came later, didn't it?

Fry: No. I even Xeroxed the Tenney report on that: [reading]
June 10, 1949, you denounced the fact that they had listed you and a number of other people.

Douglas: What date was the Tenney thing?

Fry: In '49 and probably '48, too, he made a list of all the people who were tainted with communism. So that had happened before this campaign started. You already had that--

Douglas: Planted by Nixon, since that was 1949, it was probably planted by Nixon, the way they did with Muskie! Yes. Absolutely.

I remember the Tenney committee, but I don't remember the details of it. I just don't.

The Loyalty Question

Fry: There was an early stand of yours against government loyalty cases that were brought up. This was three years before the campaign.

Douglas: There's a letter in here, do you remember, from the bishops.

Fry: I was thinking of your speech on the floor of Congress on December 18, 1947, in which you read Benjamin B. Cohen's letter to the Washington Post saying that Congress [with its investigating committees] was usurping the powers of the Department of Justice. Then there's also the record of your going to bat for the amendment which, in the bill continuing the House Un-American Activities Committee, would at least give the provision that--

Douglas: That there should be some protection for the people called up before it, and they should have a lawyer. I introduced the bill. You see, I voted always against funds for the Committee on Un-American Activities, always; at no time did I vote for funds.

But on the contempt citations, some citations I voted for, for the contempt of the committee. I had to study each one of those, and often I went to one of my lawyer friends in Washington to study a case. So finally in the House we were asked to be the second court. We were not equipped to be the second court. We did not have all the facts. We had only the interpretation of the facts in the little pamphlet that the Committee on Un-American Activities got out that was sent to each one of us or available to each one of us. That was all we had. It was a dangerous situation. Very bad, with the hysteria that was in the country.

We went through a very ugly period. In many ways, dangerous. Now it's all coming out in the open and we can see how far we've gone astray and make the corrections that are essential. Then you couldn't. It was just a kind of high temperature that the people were suffering from. The atmosphere of fear was so contagious, the fear that people had, the terrible fear.

And then in turn, some congressmen themselves feared that even they wouldn't be believed to be one hundred percent Americans, loyal Americans, and therefore they voted against their judgment, as they did for the McCarran Act.

Fry: In your records when you were back in Congress, just briefly during this campaign, in August, there was a large number of contempt citations that came up. One point here says that you voted for all of the August contempt citations and you cite your legal references to them, that it was because a person would not take the oath with the committee, that they would not agree to testify, which is different from taking the initial oath and then refusing to give information. I thought that, for the record, you might want to comment on why you voted for all of the citations that came up in August. Because it looks on the record like political expediency and your reaction to Nixon's charge that you were pink.

Douglas: No, I don't think I voted for all of them. I don't think I did. Where did you get that?

Fry: I got it from this, your compilation of the record, the Blue Book, "Helen Gahagan Douglas Versus Richard Nixon."* Earlier, you had voted against some.

Douglas: Then, that's what I'm talking about. There was a difference in the response of those coming before the committee. As I said time and time again, I regretted that if one was a Communist he didn't say he was a Communist. You know, if you believe in communism, come out and say it. They didn't. People took the Fifth Amendment.

And then people took the Fifth Amendment who were not Communists (I'm talking about Hollywood people now) but who had been with groups, [like] the Hollywood Ten. They didn't know who was a Communist and who wasn't and they were afraid of hurting people, so they would take the Fifth Amendment for that reason. There were different reasons why they took the Fifth Amendment, I'm sure.

Fry: Apparently you used the distinction between someone who would take the Fifth Amendment on answering questions from the committee and those who would refuse to give their names for the hearing.

Douglas: And I voted to cite them, I voted to cite all those cases, right. That was the difference.

Fry: And you explain that in here.

How much was this [the voting record of Helen Douglas and Richard Nixon] used in your campaign and how was it used?

Douglas: It was used for our campaign people. It was too expensive to get out into everybody's hands.

Fry: Also, it was more than anybody would ever read.

Douglas: Exactly. But since the bills that would come up were so complicated we wanted to have a handbook for someone who was head of a congressional district or assembly district or county district, if it was a heavily populated area, and that was what the Blue Book was for.

*"Helen Gahagan Douglas Versus Richard Nixon. Here is the Full Record of Their Votes in Congress," prepared by campaign staff, August 20, 1950. (mimeographed)

Douglas: We hoped it laid the background for our campaign. [laughter] But you see, unfortunately, how ignorant we were. The Blue Book wasn't as effective as it should have been, because daily those running the campaign in the various areas of the state were hit by the scurrilous stuff that came out in the newspaper every day. The people working in the district had to answer these daily attacks. The voters reading the local newspapers weren't about to listen to the Blue Book record.* In this way they avoided discussion of the issues. They never got to the votes he cast in Congress or to the votes I cast.

A man named John Brown, let us say, in Kern County, wanted to go out and make an intelligent speech--he couldn't make an intelligent speech on the campaign, because the people would say, "But what did the papers say? Well, what about this?" So that these fabricated stories would come out day after day, or innuendos, plus the telephone calls and the word-of-mouth campaigning; and the people who were put into organizations throughout the state, whether it was a church group or labor union, whatever, just dropping a word here and there, just dropping a word. What campaigning! "Did you know?" That kind of thing. "Did you hear?" Word-of-mouth vilification. That's what it is. Just what they set out to do to Muskie [in 1972]. You have it right there in the modern instance.

Fry: Did you get reports directly to you of the whispering campaign that was carried on by telephone and what was said?

Douglas: California is a big state. All we had to campaign with was my getting around, because I could answer the questions on the platform. I could reassure people, by settling questions that had been raised by the opposition. But I couldn't get around fast enough. People weren't coming to me saying, "You know they're doing this and this." It wasn't that kind of campaign, it wasn't that kind of hysteria at the center of our campaign at all. We just went ahead, I mean those of us who were doing the job.

Fry: You were moving very fast.

Douglas: Very fast! I don't know how many speeches I made a day.

*See the Halberson book on the newspaper campaign in 1950, on the shutout of my news. HGD.

Campaigning by Helicopter

Fry: And you had the helicopter.

Douglas: That was in order to get around.

Fry: You haven't told me about the helicopter, how you happened to get it.

Douglas: It was early on. People weren't using helicopters then; they hadn't used them in the military forces up to that time.

Fry: I should think that alone would have given you some press coverage!
[laughter]

Douglas: Nothing gave me press coverage!

It did, but that wasn't the reason that we had the helicopter. It was expensive to have it. The reason was that we just didn't see how we could get around with cars. We used a car to get around Southern California and greater Los Angeles, down as far as San Diego, but when I was going to the northern part of California, I never would have gotten there, just never.

Fry: The distances are so great.

Douglas: Yes. We were just thinking how we could get around fast enough, because I had to make speeches in places that were widely separated in a day and what was the least expensive way we could do it? It was by helicopter. One of us hit on the idea. Whether I hit on it or the Lybecks hit on it or Tipton hit on it, I really don't remember now.

Fry: I thought maybe it was donated to your campaign.

Douglas: No, it wasn't. We paid for it.

Fry: And paid for your pilot?

Douglas: Everything.

Fry: Did you have any problems with that helicopter?

Douglas: Well. [laughs] We had to be given permission where we could land. In one of the towns in the north they directed us to land on a raised platform the height of where the boxcars would unload when they came into the railroad station. And it was maybe five or six feet wide, if that wide. And the pilot said, "Good God, this is where they want us to land? They want to kill you."

Douglas: I said, "Never mind, just land, just land right there." He was a very good pilot. I was sure he could land.

He said, "If you don't mind getting killed, I do." [laughter] But we landed, and we got out. The people who came to hear me were frightened. I can't conceive of why they would have us land in a place like that. It really was hazardous.

Fry: Did this help you draw crowds, do you think, the helicopter coming down in the middle of these towns?

Douglas: We hoped it would. And it did, I suppose.

Fry: Did you say that you were having good crowds all through this campaign or did you see a slackening off of crowds? What feedback were you getting from your public?

Douglas: We had pretty good crowds everywhere, because you see the defection was spotty. There were many dropouts in the building trades from my campaign and many Catholics. There wasn't a time when I came in that it was empty, nobody was there. For instance, just before the campaign Jean Macauley, Captain Macauley's wife, and Sue Lilienthal, in San Francisco, they had a big meeting for me in front of the St. Francis Hotel in Union Square. And it was mobbed, mobbed, the whole place, just mobbed, the whole square. You still could have mobs like that, you know, and lose by, what was it, half a million. Or was it more? I've forgotten.

Fry: Did you have any indication that you might lose?

Douglas: Oh yes, oh yes, I had a feeling towards the end that it was going to happen--and mostly because of the atmosphere. It was intangible.

Fry: Like being under the ocean.

Douglas: Yes. Yes. Yes. And the continuous newspaper barrage against us!

Response to the "Pink Sheet"

Fry: What did you do when you first heard of or saw the pink sheet? Was this an important document that stood out above all the others in the campaign?

Douglas: As I remember it, I don't think I was nearly shocked enough. I just thought it was ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous, absolutely absurd, the way they cleverly used the votes. And by using the pink paper they tried to suggest the vote was pink.

Douglas: They kept talking about the security bill. (I noticed last night. I had forgotten all about it.) After Korea they brought out the McCarran Act, which they called the security bill. I told you that on another tape. And Nixon just waited for me to vote against the McCarran Act and smiled from across the aisle when I did. That's what he was talking about [in the pink sheet] the security act, which Truman vetoed. It's caused this trouble ever since, the beginning of the breakdown of the proper way to proceed. To protect our freedom and to guarantee that we're secure from either subversion within or betrayal within the government, there's a proper way to proceed.

Nixon couldn't attack me as a Democrat. So, number one, he tried to prove I wasn't a Democrat and tried to prove that by saying that I voted three-hundred-and-some-times with Marcantonio. (We've gone over that, that there was no "Marcantonio program.")

The only votes that Nixon could have talked about, and he did talk about some of them, were my votes in opposition to the Committee on Un-American Activities. That was not an administration bill. That was a bill introduced by congressmen, and it was an outcome of the Dies committee or development of the Dies committee.

I voted against the Greek-Turkish Military Aid bill, the first time it was presented to the House. The second year they asked for more money and that year I voted for it, but not the first year. The policy was set by the second year. We were there. I voted money, but I was against it the first time. It was a change in our policy and it was a bad change.

Fry: Did he feel that these four issues were important enough to emphasize time and again?

Douglas: If you study their campaign literature, they made of those votes a whole string of votes by presenting them different ways. But those were the only ones. I voted the straight Democratic vote. He didn't want to take me on on that basis. He didn't want to run standing on straight Republican issues against Democrats. He wanted it both ways.

Fry: According to this record here, you voted for the establishment of the CIA as a permanent entry on the budget and you always supported the FBI bills. Did you make anything of that in your campaign? I didn't come across it.

Douglas: You didn't because I'm sure I didn't. We put out these papers because I labored under the illusion that people would read. [laughter] I also couldn't conceive of anybody thinking that I would lie.

The Media

Fry: If you could have just gone on television a lot then.

Douglas: We didn't have it! Don't forget. There was no television. There was only radio. I think I was on television in Los Angeles alone maybe twice or three times. You got on with a panel and you sat there stiff as a ramrod and didn't know what to do with the lights in your eyes.

I always hated movies, loathed them, all those lights coming at you, people dabbing powder on your face every minute, and all the rest of that. I never understood how people, how women could stand it, always fussing with you, with your hair, your dress or something. And so it was in those early days on television. So we didn't have that. Just had radio.

Newspapers then--you see what newspapers are today and their importance--newspapers then were it. They were it. First of all, I had Boddy in Los Angeles. He was in my corner, had supported me in the three elections to the House. Then he was put in to run against me.

Fry: Just before the end of the campaign, I think Truman came out with a statement against the press, saying there was a lack of coverage of your campaign. How did you get him to do that?

Douglas: I didn't do it. He did it.

Fry: Oh, he did?

Douglas: Yes.

Fry: Do you think Eleanor Roosevelt helped?

Douglas: No. It was known across the country; a national scandal! Everybody there knew it. I think that's another reason why the '50 campaign hasn't been forgotten. The eastern papers carried all of this, and carried the fact, and repeated again and again, that they knew my record. They knew what I said. They carried it in the press of the East. But that didn't help us in California.

Fry: What press would be good to look up in their files on this? The Washington Post?

Douglas: Washington Post would be good.

Fry: How did the New York Times do?

Douglas: The Washington Post was friendly. All those people were my close friends. The New York Times carried articles. Anyway, those newspapermen there knew. They knew. And so Truman knew. And the press asked him the question in a press conference, didn't they? That was the way it was, in a press conference, and then he gave a statement.

Fry: He digressed from his press conference in order to say this. The San Francisco papers carried that.

Douglas: Yes. They couldn't not carry it. And obviously, he did it to help me.

The three newspapers who were for me I think I gave you, the Turlock, Wilmington, the Bee--the three McClatchy papers, Eleanor McClatchy. In the national press Drew Pearson, Elmer Davis, Ruth Finney are the ones I can think of right off. I'll send you whatever copies I have of those endorsements. Even the McClatchy papers in the finals wouldn't endorse me because of my labor votes.

A Silver Set for a Nixon Plug

Fry: But it was too late then.

Tell me about the silver creamers.

Douglas: I should think that flyer must be in Oklahoma. Two days, as I remember, before the campaign ended, in the finals, helicopters dropped flyers over Los Angeles, promising on the flyers, "If the telephone rings and you pick it up and answer, 'Vote for Nixon,' you will receive a silver salt and pepper shaker" (or a silver sugar and cream set). This may have gotten him some votes. I think the contempt for the voter is very obvious in that.

Fry: It doesn't show a very high regard, does it, of voter intelligence? After the campaign, what did you think of voter intelligence?

Douglas: They were manipulated. You know, Judge Learned Hand had a piece years and years ago, I've quoted it for a long time, warning of the danger to democracy because of the mass media and the possibility of manipulation of issues and how this could endanger the very foundations of our democracy. That's what happened in the '50 campaign. You saw it happen in a little more refined way in this last election.

The Aftermath of the Campaign

The Decision Against Litigation

- Fry: There was some litigation after Nixon's 1962 campaign in California for governor. The Democrats won the suit for an injunction against some fraudulent campaign material.
- Douglas: When Pat Brown ran against Nixon.
- Fry: And the Democrats won the decision. So I wonder about the litigation that you considered after your campaign.
- Douglas: I think that had to do with what's here, the telegram and the letter and the testimony that was given and the Los Angeles Times that then carried headlines. You read that telegram. Here it is.
- Fry: The L.A. Times was hostile.
- Douglas: Oh yes, very hostile. I'll just read the part where it talks about according to this paper, "Your woman testifies," et cetera.
- Fry: Yes, who is that woman?
- Douglas: I have no idea. I never heard of her before in my life. You know this is interesting but it shows how when falsehoods are planted, the minute the campaign is over they just don't die out. A lot of people who voted for Richard Nixon, for the most part believed wholeheartedly in what he was saying. Certainly people who are easily disturbed, hysterical, were made more hysterical not only by Richard Nixon but by McCarthy, by Mundt, the Judds, the way they carried on--at a little higher level, but they carried on the same way. And so they made people very neurotic.

And then, don't forget, we had Gerald K. Smith from California, and we had all these other people in California also poisoning people via radio, and with their speeches when they gathered together in groups, and so a lot of people just became sick on the subject. It was more than just that we were led astray in so many of our foreign policies that have cost us so dearly. Lives of people, of our men, women, and wealth, and diverting us from what we should have been doing: setting the example in the world of what democracy can be. But it left us kind of sick. I think you see this still in this last campaign we've just been through. A kind of sickness.

Douglas: People don't get over this. They're poisoned. It's a poison in the political bloodstream. The Los Angeles Times didn't help. There was no excuse for a paper of that kind behaving as it did. That was what made me sufficiently outraged so that I felt finally we should have a nice, big, juicy lawsuit. So I reached our family lawyer who'd always taken care of us and we were going to have a nice lawsuit.

Fry: What were you going to do?

Douglas: I don't remember now. But you see the Los Angeles Times printed headlines here. Do you want me to read this in?

Fry: Yes, because I really don't know what you're talking about. [laughter] I haven't read that yet.

Douglas: Oh, you haven't read this telegram that I prepared for the Times?

Fry: No, because you just brought it in today.

Douglas: This was written in 1953:

"Many of my friends in California have gotten in touch with me to express their indignation at the testimony of a woman whose name I have never heard before and about whom I know nothing, as reported in your accounts of the recent libel case of Assemblyman Vernon Kilpatrick against Beverly Hills police chief, G.H. Anderson."

(Vernon Kilpatrick was a fine assemblyman. He worked so hard all his life. He was a splendid public servant, really concerned about people and doing the best he could do for them in the assembly. And this was some case that he was involved in that had to do, I suppose, with the same Communist crusade that so many people were on.)

"According to your paper this woman testified that some nine or ten years ago, Mr. Kilpatrick allegedly invited her to an open house meeting at my home and allegedly told her that this meeting was of people who planned or hoped to bring about the economic collapse of our country. No group ever met at my house, at open house or any other time for any such purpose. To say that I have anything to do with such ideas is untrue, fantastic, and utter nonsense. I notice that in one of your stories the subheadline said, 'Red discussions declared held each week in Helen Gahagan Douglas's home.' And the text stated that at these 'open house meetings overthrow of the United States Government was discussed.' These statements being, I assume, your own irresponsible additions to this outrageous story."

Douglas: I won't go on with the other paragraphs. That is the gist of the telegram to her, because the Fords were very close to me. She said:

"Dear Helen, Everything you say in the proposed letter to the Times is true and your comments in the letter are valid. It is a disgrace to have to put up with such vicious falsehoods as Mrs. Haines put forth at the Kilpatrick trial. But Carmen and I and Florence Reynolds and others all think it extremely unwise of you to answer at this time.

"As sure as you make the true statement, 'I have never been a Communist and am prepared at any time now or in the future to swear under oath to this statement,' trouble will follow. Poulson and the Times will have Representative Jackson call you before the Committee on Un-American Activities. Once you have sworn, they will be in the position of securing two crackpots or merely devils to swear that they attended Communist meetings where you advocated communism. Then you will be prosecuted for perjury. Tom and Harold Scheier [sp?] both think that this may well be a trap to pull a [Owen] Lattimore on you.

"I know it seems cowardly to keep quiet under such outrage, but to invite and lay yourself open to prosecution is more than cowardly. It is unwise. Helen, dear, I need not tell you that we Americans are no longer protected by the Constitution, that free speech and free assembly and free thinking are no longer allowed. The tyrants are in control and the public is still with them. A depression or war might turn the tide.

"Now is the time to wait and watch and to be wary against traps set by the enemy. Jackson is powerful and relentless. He would love to drag you into a congressional investigation and to hire witnesses to testify against you falsely but effectively. And don't forget Nixon."

Fry: What did she mean by "Don't forget Nixon."

Douglas: She meant he'd be right in there with them.

"It isn't only that I am cautious and hope you will be. I do not want these deluded people who love Nixon and Ike to be swarming around and influencing others spreading the poison. It is in the public interest to keep them quiet until the fever passes. It will pass, as all hysterically-induced movements do. I think your sending

Douglas: your letter to the Times will help Poulson to show his great patriotism, and so forth," which is just the opposite of what I wanted to do. "So I hope you will at least hold it until after May 26. We will try to get information on the Haines woman.

"It's a long, long time since we have seen our Helen. Love."

It was a disagreeable, unhappy period, and we were poisoned. The blood stream was poisoned.

Fry: You never sent that letter to the Times?

Douglas: No, I never sent it; I was so advised by them. The lawyer said to me, "Helen, you've got a case, of course. But do you want to go on for months and months of this? Are you prepared to go on with cases and sit in court? It's not worth it. People know who you are. Don't do it. It will take so much out of you. You don't realize what this will cost you and you've never emotionally been seriously affected by the campaign of '50 or the subsequent acts of people. You've been able to rise above that, and this could be the last experience that you will have to rise above."

Public Response

Douglas: This is very interesting. As I campaigned around the country in the years after--I really started after the campaign doing some theater things right after '51. I started on lecture tours at the end of '50, I think it was, every year at colleges and universities.

More and more Republicans came to hear me. Then they would always give parties for me every place; when I would go to a university there would be a party. And then they would come around, the leading Republicans, and say, "Would you please answer a question." Not about the '50 campaign, but questions of issues. That proves the people can think and do read and did know something. This was in other states.

Fry: And they were questioning you about the issues of the 1950 campaign?

Douglas: No, just what was going on then, at that time, whatever it was. I mean to say that the Republicans already around the country were deeply questioning what happened in '50 and what it really meant, I suppose. And also they apparently accepted my reaction.

Fry: Who was this person that you referred to here?

Douglas: Dr. Remsen Bird. He was president of Occidental College and president of the American Association of Colleges. He was godfather of our children.

Fry: Is he a Republican?

Douglas: Well, I don't know. He was a Democrat and a Republican. He had a great many friends who were Republicans.

Comments on Watergate

Fry: I want to ask you something about your present attitudes on Watergate. We're sitting right here in New York in May of 1973 and your phone has been ringing for the last few days from the press and media, trying to get you to come out and tell whatever you want to say about Nixon, and you refuse to do this. I thought that for our record right now, you might want to say why you're not making any public statements.

Douglas: It really is a question of taste. All that my coming out would mean is that I would add some specifics about the campaign in '50. The investigation that is going on now is so serious that in no way would I want to give the impression that at this moment I'm trying to get back at the man who played me dirt. I deplore all of this today. I really deplore it.

And we haven't seen the end of it--I don't mean in the new revelations, I'm sure there will be new revelations--but I mean we haven't seen the end of it in the impact this will have abroad, the impact this will have on people here at home in further developing distrust of the government, and anybody who is in government. "They're all liars," they will think. "They're all crooks." A moral tone is set for the country, with the result that "if one succeeds that's all that matters."

Nixon influenced many people who supported him. He is not losing face because of what he did, but because what he did was done stupidly. This is a tragic thing for the people, just tragic.

Fry: You do hear this cliché repeated over and over that this is no different from what has gone on in all our campaigns since George Washington, except that Nixon got caught.

Douglas: Yes, yes. And the newspapers have tried to counter that by enumerating what has gone on over the years. There have always been things that have gone on, but not on the Nixon scale. Nothing like it at all.

Fry: Do you think that any statements from you would be adding to the public climate of distrust of public officials--if you attacked Nixon at this point, or even reported on your 1950 campaign?

Douglas: It's not the moment to say, "And by the way, look what he did to me." It just isn't. It's bad taste. It goes against my grain.

Fry: You would be asked why you didn't come out about this before.

Douglas: I hadn't thought of that. But I've refrained from talking about the '50 campaign when campaigning nationally or in elections. (People want to hear about it every place. It's unbelievable how the interest in the '50 campaign continues.)

For instance, when I was campaigning for Adlai Stevenson or in the campaign of Kennedy and of Lyndon Johnson against Nixon, it was what was happening then, it was what Nixon had done in foreign policy that mattered. That's what I campaigned on, not the '50 campaign. Suppose, for instance, Nixon had changed and become a remarkable man in every way. He wouldn't have washed the slate clean--you can't change history--but in a sense he would have redeemed himself.

But again it's the same choice I made in the campaign, in '50. You have to talk about issues. I only know one way to do it. And I don't think this is the moment to come out when every day something is breaking, and it's breaking on issues now that are relevant today, that people know, that are right here, that are happening. Why clutter it up with something that happened way across the country?

Does Jerry Voorhis come out and talk? Adlai Stevenson is dead; he can't talk. But there are many bits quoting what he said about Stevenson, what he said about Dean Acheson, this is another long case. In Jerry's case and my case, it was a much more thorough job that was done on us. And as India Edwards said [in a telephone conversation with Amelia Fry], he killed me politically.

Back to Family Life

Douglas: As a matter of fact, they wanted me to run again in California. As a matter of fact, I was invited to run in other states.

Fry: What other states?

Douglas: I've forgotten. I think Nevada was one of the states. Some of those states in the northwest would say, "Come and live here." This was shortly after the campaign. And they certainly wanted me to come to Northern California and run from there again.

Fry: Malone wanted you to run for the Senate?

Douglas: No, Malone didn't. Run for Congress from a congressional district, not for the Senate.

But I didn't run because of the children and the family. I felt they had suffered enough, their mother had been away from home enough and it was time that I be available at all times and not by appointment, as it were.

Fry: I should ask you, how did this affect your children?

Douglas: They were very good about it, but they did miss something. I was brought up in a family where mother was always there. I think children miss something when their mother is not at home. And with the war and Melvyn overseas, it was a hard time for them.

Fry: I meant specifically the Nixon charges in 1950.

Douglas: They were very shaken by the '50 campaign. I remember when Mary Helen, twelve years old, called me and she said, "Mummy, Mummy, what are they saying about you over the radio? They are saying terrible things about you, Mother." This was in the '50 campaign.

Additional Reflections on the Campaign

Future Leader of Pakistan in the Campaign

Fry: Helen, can you give me a little insert that we'll put in here on that story about Mr. Bhutto supporting you in 1950?

Douglas: We're talking about Bhutto of Pakistan, right?

Fry: What was he doing supporting you then? Where was he in 1950?

Douglas: He was at the United Nations. Two clippings were sent to me, as I remember, having to do with Bhutto and the '50 campaign--the fact that he had supported me in the '50 campaign and had been rather critical of Richard Nixon's manner of campaigning.

When he went back to Pakistan--or even before he went; maybe it was in his press conference here in the United States--the fact that he had supported me when he was a student at the university, in California, was rediscovered, as it were. So the press questioned him about it. It was rather interesting, because the U.S., as you know, had supported Pakistan in the war. Now here was the man who had opposed Nixon and had been critical of him in '50--where did he stand now? Because Pakistan was going to have to have help from the United States. It was rather embarrassing for Bhutto, I'm sure.

I don't think I ever met Bhutto in 1950. I was not aware of the fact that he had supported me, because a lot of people support one that one doesn't meet or know about. He was a student then. After that, I think there was a second press clipping that someone sent me, some friend or maybe a stranger--I often receive letters and clippings from people whom I don't really know--describing Bhutto's discomfort and his statement in support of President Nixon, and the excuse that as a young man he hadn't used good judgment, or some such thing. I remember a letter that came to me saying, "How could he change? Couldn't he show any guts at all?"

I think it's only an amusing incident, really. But I think it highlights that so many men, who come to the United States to be educated at the university level or the postgraduate level, who then go back to their country and become part of history, are influenced as a result of their studies here. This is not only true of students who are coming here today, and have been coming here, but it's true of students who went to England, or they went to France, or they went to Germany--they carried back with them part of the country that afforded them years of higher education, you see.

There's a kind of entanglement, then, in their thinking in the years ahead, that is related to this very impressionable period in their lives. I think it's only interesting in these terms--the Bhutto story.

Fry: But you've hit upon something that has become a very wide portion of America's influence all over the world, and that's the fact that we are now what Germany was at the turn of the century. Scholars come here to complete their education.

Douglas: Well, England, too. Don't forget England.

Fry: So this academic imperialism is--

Douglas: I don't like that word "imperialism." I think there is a kind of imperialism in, certainly industry--where industry then seeks to influence the changes in the governments of foreign countries that they think will benefit their work or their investment. I call that a kind of imperialism. But the rest is nonsense.

In the industrial age the world became interdependent, because it had to in order to support industry. We are now at the point of development where if we're not working cooperatively, we're not going to survive. We mustn't shy away from the influences of the cultures of certain parts of the world. We must try to absorb them, understand them. Nationalism in the old sense--it doesn't exist anymore in this world which can be destroyed in a few hours. It simply doesn't exist!

So that's why, when people keep talking about "imperialism" and they name everything "imperialistic," it's so sloppy; it's so careless. I think it has to be defined more precisely. I really don't think people can get away with it. We try to exert our influence; the Russians try to exert their influence. What we've got to do is to not try to exert influence purely for short-term personal gain, but to use our influence--England, the Russians must use theirs, also for the other countries--in order to work cooperatively for goals that are essential if we are going to survive, not only in terms of a nuclear war, which will finish us all off, but in destroying this habitat. Nothing can be controlled by an individual country today, nothing.

Fry: The academic imperialism that I kept running into, as a sort of underlying accusation, when I was at this International Scholars Conference in Mexico this summer was based, I think, on the resentment of Latin American countries that the research funds reside in the United States, really, and that advances in knowledge pretty much come from the United States, even though they have the scholars and they have people eager to go ahead in this.

They don't have the money, the ways to finance it; they have to apply to the Rockefeller Foundation, or to AID, or something like that to get this. They feel that the United States' academic community is directing the areas in which research goes, and that they don't have much say in it. I can understand that.

Douglas: I can understand it, and I think that is true in a way. But we can't be faulted for the fact that at this hour we have the money and they don't. I mean, we could have the money and say we're not going to give any money! And of course some influence comes with it. Now, I've always believed that much of this money for our own purposes--for our own long term needs--should be siphoned through the United Nations, so that we're not subject to this kind of criticism. Do you see?

Fry: Yes, I certainly do.

Douglas: Yes. And so I think that's the way we can get around such criticism. But to take Rockefeller--I've seen the work of Rockefeller in South America when I made the study tour of South America. It's exemplary! And if there was some influence, of which I was not aware, nevertheless the research that was being done was basic, in agriculture, for example, the work they were doing in Brazil.

Paying the Campaign Debts

Fry: All right. Helen, you want to go on to giving us a picture of what happened after the 1950 election was over, and where you and Melvyn moved to, and what you did with your house, and things like that? The story was abroad in the land that you had to sell your house in California to repay your campaign expenses.

Douglas: Of course that is false, as are many other stories that are put out, not only about me, but about other candidates. We didn't have to sell the house. We were not in that kind of financial straits at all. There was a debt left at the end of the '50 campaign.

In terms of today it was nothing. I've forgotten--I could get the exact figures--but I think it was something like \$16,000. But because we were not spending on our '50 campaign or the congressional campaigns before that--the kind of money that is being spent today, it seemed a lot. At the end of the campaign there were a few people--three or four, maybe--who voluntarily sent me some money and said, "I'm sure at the very end, expenses were undertaken that left you with a debt."

Fry: Would you like to name those people?

Douglas: I can't at the moment. There was a man down in San Diego whom I will be seeing now--I can't recall his name just for the instant. They were the people that were close to me and supported me. They just sent checks in to Evelyn Chavoor, who was with me at that time in the house and had helped run the campaign.

I was in very great demand, and immediately began to give lectures; and I paid off the debt, myself! It was my pride to do so. Then Melvyn paid the tax on the debt. He laughed and said, "You know, it would have been simpler if I'd just paid the debt, Helen, and finished with it."

Douglas: But anyway, we did not sell the house at once, and when we did sell the house--I guess a year later or two years later; I've forgotten now--we sold it because Melvyn wanted to be in New York, in the theater; we moved back there, to be all together. We had been separated for so many years, in the war and in the two years, really, preceding the war, when Melvyn was in Washington off and on. Unless the house was rented, it was just too heavy to carry; so we sold it.

We'd had a house in Carmel that we'd built. (We also built the house in Los Angeles.) I sold the house in Carmel during the war, because Dr. Remsen Bird, our close friend and godfather of our children, who was the former president of Occidental College, wrote me and said, "Helen, the house in Carmel, they say, needs a new roof." That seemed to me to be outrageous, to think that a new house needed a roof, and I didn't have the money, when I was in Congress. So I said, "Sell it." So we sold it for practically what it cost us to build it, and it was not very expensive.

Fry: This was the one on the block above the Carmel Mission.

Douglas: Carmel Mission. And at that time there were no houses around. It was a beautiful site. Today it's very crowded, because there are houses surrounding, hugging, the Carmel Mission, coming right up to what was our patio. But you still can see out from that patio, because it's higher out, onto the ocean.

Fry: Did you stay in Carmel at all very much?

Douglas: Not really very much. We went up there in the summer, and we were there a few years. Then Melvyn went to Washington to serve as a volunteer in the OCD; I was in Carmel with the children and Melvyn's mother. Of course, as soon as I went to Congress, it was not possible to go there. I did go there before Melvyn went overseas, and Melvyn was there too. We were there shortly.

Then I flew to San Francisco to take the plane back to Washington. We forget how risky it was to take a plane at the time because you might not get across the country for two days. We ran into bad weather, and so the plane would have to land in airport after airport. It took us about two days and a half.

In the meantime, I began to display skin problems that showed I had either poison ivy or poison oak. Well, it was poison oak. We never landed in Washington. We finally landed, in the middle of the night, in Philadelphia. Each stop we came down we might stay two or three hours, and I would go to a doctor, and the doctor would give me something.

Douglas: If I was supposed to put a little bit on my face; I was so distraught by this time with the discomfort, that I would put it all on. I have fine skin, and sensitive skin, and as a result, I didn't realize I was burning off the top layer of my skin.

By the time I got to Philadelphia I looked as if I had some malignant disease. The night clerk was afraid to look at me; he turned away. It was an old hotel in Philadelphia, where I'd gone many times before, and they weren't going to let me in! Now this is about two or three o'clock in the morning. So I began to cry, and I told them who I was, and I said, "I'm sick." So then they were very sweet, and they said, "Oh, we're sorry, we're sorry." They took me upstairs. My eyes were so swollen that I couldn't see to open my bag. So I rang for someone to come and open it.

I went to sleep, and next morning I awoke and called my brother Walter in New York. I was crying on the phone, which is not like me, really, to cry; but by then I was utterly exhausted. He said, "I'm sending a car for you at once." I said, "No, no, no, don't send a car; I couldn't take a car from here to New York; I couldn't, I couldn't, I couldn't." So then he said, "Helen, ring for the operator. I'll talk to the manager."

He talked to the manager, and the manager agreed that they would put me on the train; they would give me a private room; they would see that a bed was made up for me--and you could do that at that time. So they made up the berth, and I lay there until I got to New York, where Walter met me and took me right away to Harkness Pavillion, the hospital there in New York, Columbia Hospital.

I had burned off the top layer of my skin! And the poison oak was all over my body. It was just, oh, it was a horrifying experience. I was in bed for two weeks, and all they did was put on wet compresses, that I think had soda in it.

And the press was downstairs tormenting the hospital; that's what I remember at this moment! They kept thinking something strange had happened to Mrs. Douglas, and everybody was keeping it a secret. When they'd say "poison oak," they [the press] had never heard of it. They didn't know what they [the doctors] were talking about.

The hospital became so annoyed, they were so overrun with the press. I apologized and said, "I'm sorry, I don't want them here either; but what can you do about it? Give them an explanation of what poison oak is, and tell them they better not get it."

Anyway, we did go to Carmel when I was in Congress and Melvyn hadn't as yet been sent overseas. I sold the house before Melvyn came back from India, Burma and China where he was during the war.

- Douglas: He was very disappointed to think that I'd sold it. "Why didn't you sell the Los Angeles house?" I said, "Well, because the Los Angeles house was rented." It was my pride not to draw from Melvyn's estate while I was in Washington, you see.
- Fry: You were trying to live on your congresswoman's salary?
- Douglas: My congresswoman's, and then I used the rent money from the house in Los Angeles to take care of Melvyn's mother, who had her apartment in Hollywood, and whatever other expenses there were. The rent money paid the mortgage and the gardener.
- Fry: Congressmen didn't get very much in those days.
- Douglas: Twelve thousand dollars then. And there was less for the staff than there is now. The various projects that I wanted to pursue, there wasn't the extra money to bring in someone--to add to the staff--to do some research work for me.
- Fry: You didn't have a trust fund then from your family that you could call on?
- Douglas: I had nothing, nothing. And at that time, you see, my brother Walter was in the judge advocate's office. One of the twins had died of leukemia, in 1940--he was forty. The other brother had been ill for a while. No, I guess Frederick hadn't died. Well, I'm skipping, because he was in Panama at that time, during the war, in charge of building boats. So he died after that.
- Fry: He was older than you?
- Douglas: Two years.
- Fry: So that would have been before 1940.
- Douglas: No. No, because we always thought maybe--there's no reason to believe it now, we know--the fact that he was in Panama at that period might have been responsible for his developing leukemia.
- Fry: Later you did sell your Los Angeles house?
- Douglas: Yes.
- Fry: That was in the fifties?
- Douglas: Yes, I've forgotten the exact date.
- Fry: But much later.

Douglas: Well, not much later, as a matter of fact. But it had nothing to do with the need of money. Melvyn didn't want to live in Los Angeles; it was onerous to have to find someone to rent the house; you never knew whether the renters would destroy the house; you had to have the upkeep; it was a big house, and the upkeep was heavy.

It was a wooden house, spread out over the ground, you know. It would need roofs, it would need everything! And there were a lot of grounds with it. So the upkeep was tremendous, no matter what the rent was. So Melvyn just wanted to be finished with that.

He came back from the war, and he just didn't want that. And he didn't want to work in the pictures, he didn't want to make that kind of money. That's not the way to put it. He didn't want to limit his life to a pattern in which he was restive and unhappy, simply to make much more money. So that had nothing to do with the campaign at all. It had to do with reorganizing the way we were living.

[interrupting interviewer] Let me just add this about the cost of campaigns. Remember that in the congressional campaigns and in '50, we didn't use television. I went on television twice, very self-consciously. There were a number of us; we didn't know what to do, you know, on television. We didn't know how it would come out, but we were very self-conscious and unhappy with it. So there wasn't that expense. There was the expense of the radio, which was very much less than it is today, of course. And we didn't use radio as much as it's used today.

Fry: Oh, is that right?

Douglas: There are many more people today. A candidate almost has to use radio and television in order to reach people. People don't go to meetings, as they used to.

Fry: That's right. And also, people don't read newspapers like they used to.

Campaign Organization

Fry: Why don't we go to some quick answers that I'd like to put in our section on the 1950 campaign? First of all, we need some more graphic idea of what you were doing and how your daily routine was organized. Did you have a person go ahead of you and precede you to a town to set up arrangements or anything? Or did you just land there?

Douglas: No, you never just land in a campaign; you'd be talking to yourself. But we didn't have the advance guard that more highly financed campaigns had and have today. We didn't have that. I think once in awhile we had a publicity man go ahead to work with the local people, but the local districts were in charge. They would make arrangements through the office in the south, if it was the southern half of the state; if it was the northern half of the state, they would make the arrangements through the northern office, the central office.

They would say, "We want Douglas here. When is she coming north? How soon can we have her?" Then the northern office would schedule an appearance in that district with appearances in the surrounding area.

You ask how often would I speak--I would speak all day long, and in the evening, too. Furthermore, there would be, usually (it was unusual when this wasn't so) a luncheon meeting with people in a given area, where I would speak. They'd have a chance to meet me, to ask questions. And there'd be a dinner in the evening. There might even be a tea or something in some towns. So the actual program for a given town would be organized by the local people. The date when I would appear there would have been set up with the help of the northern office or the southern office.

Fry: When you spoke--

Douglas: They would have, from the northern office and the southern office, material--for instance, the Blue Book that gave my voting record and Richard Nixon's record--and what I said about a given bill, if we thought that bill was very important. It described my stand. That was made available to the chairman. That was expensive to get out, that Blue Book. Then we had some other basic material which one had to study and read and become acquainted with, so that they had material to refer to.

They'd have basic material to which they could refer. They wouldn't have to call in and say, "Mrs. Douglas, on such-and-such a vote, how did she vote?" There was the record of how I voted on all key votes. If I had something to say that we thought was important to be known throughout the district, that particular statement that I would have made on the congressional floor--the House of Representatives--would be part of that Blue Book or this other big book that was gotten out for the county people, the key people.

They would use campaign material that was gotten out in the north and they got out their own campaign material. The north used some of the campaign material sometimes from the south, and the south used some from the north. But also, local people would get out a very simple piece of literature in answer to something with

- Douglas: which that community was particularly interested in--to state where I stood on that issue; how I had voted, if it came to a vote in the House of Representatives. What else did you want to know?
- Fry: I was wondering if, as the local people put out their own materials, there was anyone in your office in Los Angeles or San Francisco that would check on this, just to be sure that this was responsible campaigning?
- Douglas: I don't know whether they did that organizationally. I think mostly that those who were in charge of campaigns were greatly trusted, and they knew what they were doing. They were politically astute.
- Fry: Were you able to use the regular county Democratic organizations all over?
- Douglas: Yes. Well, I don't know about all over--some places maybe not. I can't tell you at this time. But we did use them, of course. Also we had our own committees that were set up. And remember, I'd been a national committeewoman, the state vice-chairman, so that there were women's groups all over the state who worked in our campaign.
- The people that worked in the '50 campaign became the nucleus of those that worked in the Adlai Stevenson campaign and those who worked in the Kennedy campaign later on. The same people work now supporting the Senator and the governor in the present race. The same people are still working, or their children are working. And some of them began when we elected Olson years before--the first Democratic governor in twenty-four years, or something like that, in the state of California.
- Fry: Do you remember Bill Malone doing anything? Or was he very quiet? I have in my mind that maybe he continued to either oppose you or just not give any help, even after the primary.
- Douglas: I don't know, no. I'd be guessing. I don't really know. I know that he was opposed to my running in the primary that year. We all knew that he was opposed. They didn't want me to run against Sheridan Downey, the Democratic Senator. They offered to support me if I would run two years later against the Republican Senator. That was generally known. Now, as to what he did in the finals, I don't know. I was so busy just getting around the state and fulfilling my commitments, that I had no time to check on people. Every now and then someone would say, "So-and-So is helping you very much," or "So-and-So is dragging their feet," but I didn't carry all that with me.

Perceptions of Nixon's Strategy in 1950

- Fry: That brings me to my other question, about what your perceptions were of what Nixon was doing at that time. Were you aware of his campaign? Were you trying to answer it speech for speech?
- Douglas: No, no. I wasn't answering him at all, except in the most general way now and then. I was talking about the issues. I had been projecting ahead what was going to happen, what I believed had to happen if we were going to be on a sound course, and I did not spend my time finding out what Nixon said the day before and what I was going to answer. It wasn't that kind of campaign.

Now, people throughout the state supporting me, I'm sure, were answering. They had the basic information on me, to which they could turn. They weren't fooled. That's why they haven't been fooled all these years. Because we didn't give them the kind of temporary literature designed only to present someone seeking office in a way that would win votes for that particular campaign but didn't in any way really reveal where the candidate stood. It wasn't literature designed in that way.

We were very explicit in what I stood for, what I thought ought to be done; and I talked about it all the time. In other words, the Nixon campaign didn't twist my campaign out of shape. It was my campaign. He had his campaign, and [I had] my campaign. We got reverberations of it, you know, as went around the state. But again, I turned it off when people would talk about it, and talk about the issues. I'd [say], "Remember this. This is what you must keep in mind. This is what is at stake now."

The details of the '50 campaign have only come to light for me--for me--in these years in between, when people would write to me and say, "Did you know that there was a telephone campaign exactly as in Jerry's campaign?" The night before the election those phone calls went out--one claim was that half a million of them went out--claiming, "Did you know Helen Gahagan Douglas was a Communist?" It was an anonymous call, and then the phone would go down. They did the same thing with Jerry. I didn't know that at the time. It wouldn't have changed the campaign; there was nothing I could do about it anyway.

I didn't know about other programs that were put on in certain areas. For instance, a man told me the other night, in New Jersey where I was given the American Civil Liberties award, that when he was a young man in California, he was in the southern part of California--I think it was Orange County or one of the counties near Orange County. In the back of the truck there was a flyer that said, "Keep the Jew Communists out of Congress."

Douglas: Now, after the campaign was over, people said to me, "Did you know that anti-Semitism was used?" Because Mel's father was a Jew--and there was no secret about that, for goodness sake! I said, "No, I didn't know that it was [used]." But I wouldn't have spent precious hours with the voters discussing something that didn't need to be discussed! It was no secret, you know.

Fry: And hardly a national issue.

Douglas: Well, it might be an issue if you tried, for some reason, to cover it up. But anyway, to answer the question, "Did I know everything that was being done?" I did not; but my people did. After the campaign was over, I was so relieved to wake up the next morning and feel that I was free and that Nixon hadn't taken possession of my mind, you know, that I went around the state for the next few days consoling people. At first I think people didn't want to tell me ugly things, it was all too depressing, you know. I didn't invite Nixon campaign stories.

Fry: This was after the campaign?

Douglas: After the campaign. But in the subsequent year--in these last years, for instance--I've gotten letters from all over the country from people that were out there: students, some of them now professors, that recall certain instances, and say, "Mrs. Douglas, do you remember," such and such a thing happening. And certain of those instances I do remember.

For instance, in the University of Southern California I was speaking on campus--that's in the press; you can get that. I apparently had considerable support on the campus. A haywagon came by, and sitting atop the hay were a number of men with silk hats on and cutaway dinner coats--evening, full dress coats--in their underpants. They had siphons of water--they had a lot of them in the hayrack--and they tried to wet everybody in the crowd. I think Segretti was one of those people.

A professor at the University of Pennsylvania who was a student at USC in the 1950 campaign, wrote me asking if I remembered my visit to USC as he did. "Do you remember it this way? Am I remembering it exactly correctly? Because we are now documenting what happened in that '50 campaign, as we try to reconstruct the occurrences in the campaign." I said, "Yes, I remember it exactly that way; that's the way it did occur."

The president of the university then sent me an apology, and the local campus apologized, and so forth. Well, it broke up the meeting!

Fry: This was at Berkeley?

Douglas: Not Berkeley--the University of Southern California.

Fry: At UCLA, or at USC?

Douglas: USC. It was done, you see, the way it was described in the '72 campaign. It was all a trick! It was all an amusing kind of escapade. But it was designed to break up meetings. I had that, and I had heckling. And it increased in intensity.

I knew that they were working through the Catholic church against me. We knew that because some of my key people in the north and south were very strong supporters of the Catholic church. Some of the professors at Loyola were my strong supporters in my southern campaign. They would tell me what the church was doing. It didn't escape them. For a certain number of weeks, before the end of the campaign, there were sermons by someone in the church, one of the priests, on the danger of communism. Outside the church, on the steps, there were Nixon people giving out Nixon literature, which finished the subject. In other words, "If you want to know where the threat is here in California, it's Douglas." The implication was clear.

So that I knew. So if you ask, "Did I know everything that went on?" I did not know everything that went on. But there were the big programs in the Nixon campaign that one couldn't escape because one's own people who were at the head of the campaign were so concerned.

For instance, in Northern California they arranged for me to meet with the bishop. He was very gracious, and he saw us, and they talked about my record. He said [softly imitating him], "I know Mrs. Douglas's record; it's very well known. There's nothing secret about her record. It's an admirable record, one that can be supported."

They said, "Well, but..."

He said, "Well, but what? The Catholic church doesn't take part in any campaign."

Fry: So he wouldn't even admit--

Douglas: Well, I don't know that he knew what was happening in Southern California; I think mostly it was in Southern California. I'm not sure that it was carried on in Northern California by the church. Judge Dieden would know, but I don't think so. Did he think it was?

Fry: Yes, and I think he went over, too. It may have been the same thing, trying to send word down to the priests not to hit this so hard.

Douglas: He went with me. That's right.

Fry: Who, at the University of Pennsylvania, is documenting the '50 campaign? Do you know?

Douglas: I have those letters in New York, but I've forgotten the man's name now.

Now, much of the mail that comes in now, in these last few months, I've just thrown away. I just couldn't cope with it all. I mean, they were all answered, and for a while I kept interesting letters, you know, but there's no place to keep them!

Fry: If it's information on this '50 campaign--

Douglas: Where am I going to send it?

Fry: --send it to me! Okay?

Douglas: [laughs] Next time around. There won't be this kind of avalanche of mail coming in if there isn't something happening in the country that evokes it.

Fry: Let's hope we don't have that again right away!

Douglas: Oh, I hope so, too. I wish none of it had happened.

Fry: Did you talk, or have you heard from people in this avalanche of mail and phone calls after Nixon's resignation, who actually got the telephone calls?

Douglas: Yes! Yes! That's how it was called to my attention, and I have those letters.

Fry: Because last time, when we talked before that, we didn't know who we could go to to document it.

Douglas: But since then, a man who was a producer at MGM, wrote to me saying, "I haven't seen you since such and such a time. I want to tell you how I'm feeling at this time," and "I've disliked Nixon for so long"--the usual kind of thing. I thought the man was an actor who'd been in one of my very first plays, but he was the producer! Now he's an old man and he lives in Pennsylvania, and he's kind of crochety, I gather from his letters. He said, "I'll never forgive him. I'll never forget that night before the election," when he got this phone call.

So then I showed it to Melvyn and he said, "Well, what proof has he got? How does he know about this?"

Douglas: So I wrote him and said, "Do you mind telling me...?" And he said that at that time there were a half a million such calls made. So I wrote back and said, "What evidence have you got?" Then he gave me the name of another producer at MGM who also received a phone call, and he was so outraged that after the campaign was over, he had a research job done which he financed, to find out how extensive these phone calls had been. The result of that was the half a million calls.

Now that man's dead, and this old man says, "I've given the university the information."

I said, "Are you going to help?"

He said, "I'm too old! I can't get involved. I've given the information to the university; let the university find out about it."

But evidences of that kind have come in, you know. And I haven't sought it. I don't particularly seek it today. Historians want to document the '50 campaign, and it's important because this particular man became president. I think the lives and the doings of anyone that becomes president, then, are of interest.

Fry: Not just that, Helen. I think that this also set up a certain type of campaigning that even trickled down into small, local campaigns like school board campaigns. For instance, in our own little school board in Northern California, we had later one horrible election where this same thing was used.

People would knock on doors or make phone calls and say, "Did you know that this other school board member is a Communist?" and hang up or disappear. It kind of permeated the local campaigning at the time. In this instance that I'm talking about, it happened to be a very conservative element that was using it.

Douglas: I think what was new--and I'm not actually sure that I'm right about this--was the injection of communism to prove that certain people running for office were disloyal to the country. This was new. There were scurrilous campaigns carried on throughout our history, but this was new. This was new--questioning the patriotism of people, and manipulating the changes that had taken place in the world for their own short-term advantage.



Photographed at the first post-war hearing on migratory labor, Washington, D.C., February 5-6. Left to right: front row, Dr. Frank P. Graham, Eleanor Roosevelt, James Mitchell (secretary of labor in Eisenhower administration); back row, A. Philip Randolph, Helen Gahagan Douglas.



Reunion of Helen and some of her workers on 1950 campaign. Upper left-Ruth Lybeck; lower right-Rosalind Wyman; middle standing-Elizabeth Snyder

V REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF CAREER AND FAMILY

Reading Emily Dickinson

Fry: Would you like to say your favorite Emily Dickinson line?

Douglas: [quoting] "I'm Nobody! Who are you? Are you Nobody too? Then there's a pair of us! Don't tell! They'll banish us, you know!* How dreary to be Somebody! How public--like a frog. To tell your name the livelong June to an admiring bog!"

This is one I like very much [quoting]:

"I felt a funeral in my brain and mourners to and fro kept treading, treading, till it seemed that sense was breaking through. And when they all were seated, a service like a drum kept beating, beating, till I thought my mind was going numb. And then I heard them lift a box, and creak across my soul with those same boots of lead, again, then space began to toll. As all the Heavens were a bell, and being but an ear, and I, and silence, some strange race wrecked, solitary here. And then a plank in reason, broke, and I dropped down, and down, and hit a world at every plunge, and finished knowing then."

Isn't she remarkable? It could be anything that's been happening to us; it could. Let me see what else I can remember right off --I'll get the book later and do some more. There's a possibility that I'll do a record of those, if I can ever get around to it.

*The Dickinson poem reads,
"They'd advertise, you know!" Ed.

Douglas: But what I want to do, and what Mary has suggested, is to describe the period in which she lived, which is so interesting--Civil War, you know; she was writing at the height of the Civil War--and her family background, as you know, they established Amherst; they helped found Amherst. She was surrounded by thinking people of the river area, from Boston on down; so it wasn't as if she didn't have background.

I'd like to talk a little bit about that, and then to quote her letters. Her letters are unbelievable. There are people at Harvard University doing the last definitive work in putting together her poems. In the early days they couldn't believe that she said what she said, and the way she said it, so they'd change it!

First, there were great periods between the time that they discovered her poems. They knew that she wrote verse now and then, but it was only after her death that her sister Lavinia found in the closet shoebox after shoebox filled with poems tied together with little strings, some of them on the backs of the household bills that came in the back door. Then was the long struggle--they were all in her handwriting, which was very difficult to decipher.

Then there's the story of how this beautiful woman--Mabel Todd, or whatever her name was--across the street, the wife of a professor. She came from a family that was highly trained; her father was an astronomer, as I remember. She worked for a number of years to put this first book together, and that was before 1900. Then there was a long period when nothing was done. But the whole story of her life is so interesting, and the need she had to be recognized as a poet, her self-discipline as she refused to accept anything that was less than her worth; she knew she was a poet, she knew she was a great poet. She had no recognition in her life, you see.

Fry: Had she tried to publish these?

Douglas: She had a few published, but there was a man she wrote to who was a scholar in Boston. He was a great critic of the day--he was a Unitarian minister. She wrote to him and asked him if her poems spoke. He wrote back and asked, "What do you read? What do you study? Who are your friends?" This must have so saddened her. She called him her preceptor, and all her life she wrote to him, but she'd never again attempt it.

She thought, "If he can't understand what I'm saying..." (probably; now I'm reading into it, because there's no evidence of that), then she made no effort after that. She would talk about

Douglas: how inspiration came to her, and outside, the only person that she received was inspiration; other people would come by her door and it was locked.

Her life is itself a poem, and so revealing of the times, too. She broke away, you see, from the poets who were overladen with language; she cut down, cut down, cut down, to say in a few words what she thought was important. So what you have really is the essence of an emotion.

None of her poems had names, you know; the name is always the first line of the poem. In "I felt a funeral in my brain," she talks about the "numbness" that comes after a certain degree of suffering--the numbness the next day after a person dies that you loved; the sweeping up of life, putting it away, that you won't need again. She wrote about that "numbness," the "freezing."

She compares in one poem the fact that when people are freezing and suffering, finally a numbness comes; there's a point beyond which you can't suffer. It seems to me that no one that I know has consistently, through their work, so caught the essence of an emotion as she has. So it lives! It lives!

The young people who know her, react to her; whereas they wouldn't react to the older poets that were thought of as being so great. What they had to say was in such fancy garb that it's out of date. Hers isn't out of date--it's just stripped clean and there's nothing else you can do with it. Now, there are a few expressions that are of the culture of her time, but otherwise no.

Well, shall we talk now about women? You see, there was a woman, Emily Dickinson, brought up in a family where she had her chores and her family. They had help, but she made the pies and cakes, and she'd go up to bed at night with a candle and work at night; that's where she worked, up in her room at night by candle-light.

This outpouring of talent in these five or six years, no wonder she couldn't do anything else, because it must have been with her day and night. You know how you get absorbed in your work and you get absent-minded, and the children say something to you and you're not really with it? Well, she couldn't have been really with it as she went around--the emotion that she must have felt in all this.

She was establishing her independence in her own way. She was protecting her talent in refusing to sell it in the market place-- she talks about selling it in the market place and refusing to; you can't go to the market place with anything that's worth anything.

Douglas: She wouldn't take less than was her due. She wouldn't have pleasure in just appearing in this magazine or that magazine, someone saying, "This is quite an interesting talent." At the moment that her preceptor wrote and asked her these questions, she had written some three hundred poems that are classics! In fact, the poem she sent --the choice of the poem she sent--showed the range of her emotional richness.

Fry: How did she manage to maintain her independence?

Douglas: Within the confinement of her family and the time in which she lived. She got so she would not come down, not meet anybody, not see anybody, and they made a great deal of this. I think it was just the way she could protect herself. She was protecting her inner being at all times.

Fry: Shall I start out with our Harvard experience?

Douglas: You have to explain first, where the question was asked.

Sources of Douglas's Independence

Fry: At the Berkshire conference, sponsored by Radcliffe College, in which this whole question of women's independence was discussed. A large part of the comments came from women who had to fight for their independence through the feminine mystique of the fifties, and came to freedom in the sixties as a new experience.

I was wondering how this differed from someone like you, who wasn't in her twenties in the fifties and just beginning to attain adulthood in the rather oppressive social roles that women had then, but instead had independence right from the first. What I'd like to do now is to look back over your life and have you pick out things which you can see as a force making you independent. Was there ever a point where you had to try to "liberate" yourself?

Douglas: No, I never thought of liberating myself in this sense that women talk about liberation today; it never occurred to me that I was liberating myself. In a sense I was, but from the very beginning of my early years I was interested in doing anything that related to the theater. That was one aspect of it, and I pursued that with a one track mind. That began at a very early age, when I hardly knew what a theater was; I certainly hadn't been in one.

But in asserting my independence, which is what I did in relation to my brothers, was simply determination to have my say and do whatever they did--not to be left out. So it was very early

Douglas: on I had the experience, the practice, of self-assertion. But I was practicing it within the family, so there were certain restrictions. I was working within those restrictions and conscious of the restrictions. But at all times I was trying to assert myself. So I had the experience. Now, remember that I was born in 1900, so this is long before women said, "We have to be liberated," in the fifties. So I had that experience.

Then as I developed and came beyond the age of twelve, thirteen, maybe around there, or fourteen, I had my full height. What was I? Five-foot-seven-and-a-half at my full height. So I looked much more grown up than I was. Then, the fact that for so many years I had talked about the theater--I had acted in school (I hadn't worked at my lessons the way the rest of the children in the family worked at them) I was always preoccupied with the theater--began to disturb my father.

You know, this was not just something that one of his daughters was interested in that would pass, although he was an admirer of the theater and went to the theater. He loved the theater and loved music, but he didn't want his daughter to be in the theater. And it began to be serious. The very fact that I was as fully mature physically as I was at the age of thirteen, fourteen also worried him. At that point I began to meet opposition by one of my parents, who was a very forceful, dominant man. So I had practice again in winning through to the goal that I thought was to be an actress.

I think, therefore, that the experience that I had in my family--it doesn't necessarily hold for any other family--prepared me for independence. It prepared me through practice, the same as if one is learning to play the piano. One has to sit at the piano and practice.

If one has to become independent, what does independence mean? It not only means that your life isn't dominated by someone else; that's secondary, really. It means that you are liberated within yourself, and no one can give you this; no one can give you this. I almost had that sense of independence from the beginning, and I think that has been true of many women in the past, who, many years before my youth, had that sense of independence; they were just born with it.

It's a freakish thing--it's like being born with a voice, or being born with a sense of color; some people have it and some people don't. It may go back to some accident of youth. There may have been certain conditions that made people feel that they weren't up to independence, without their knowing it as children.

Douglas: And you get teachers. I don't know. I have always thought that what happened to one was largely accidental. It was accidental that I almost always had outstanding teachers to guide me. It was accidental, but in our family this was an accident of birth. There was never any question but that the girls should be educated, and have an education that took them into colleges and beyond that if they wanted to go. There was never any question of that. The only issue was would I be allowed to do what I wanted to do, which wasn't in the prospectus for me.

I support all women's groups (but I don't agree with all things women are saying today) because I think it's good if women are moving; they'll find their way. Women find their way in any number of ways. You can't say, "This is the way you go about it." That's why I make much of the fact of "accident."

Suppose you brought up an only child--where are you going to get any practice? An only child is probably spoiled to begin with; so the only child never has a sense that her life or his life is being directed, against the wishes of that only child in some cases. There may be an only child who from the very first knew that she (let's just say "she" at the moment) could do whatever she wanted to do and she'd have the full support of her mother and father.

This may weaken her in later years, because she has never had to develop the ability to withstand opposition. I know a very distinguished woman who spoke to me (without naming her), who had a very brilliant life. The minute opposition appeared, the last part of her life crumbled under her. She had never had opposition at any time.

So there isn't the formula for the freeing of the individual to fulfill oneself; it would be easier if there were a formula. There isn't any, because each woman starts with a different background, different pluses and minuses, and different goals, and different understanding of what independence is (let's not use the word "liberation"), independence to direct your own life.

We talked a little bit before, and I think it's important to add here, Chita, that for a woman married, with her children, she is again circumscribed. It's not possible for a man or woman to function independent of his family relations. A woman asked me recently, at a college--she's in a modern woman's group--what I thought of the fact that her husband said to her that it was all right for her to have a career, but he had to come first. She said, "What do you think of that?" I said, "I think it's just right."

Surely the human relations between oneself and one's dear ones have to come first, before the work. Otherwise one is shortchanging themselves in the most vital part of their lives. And that's not

Douglas: easy, but you, and the male too, must have the same concern for the woman he lives with and the mother of his children. Independence must be there, but at the same time there must be the recognition of what the family has to be given, the place the family has to be given, as each pursues the work they are most interested in. That has to do with the father or the mother and the children; otherwise don't get married, don't have children. There's a difference between liberation and responsibilities; it gets confused sometimes, don't you think?

Fry: I think they get separated sometimes.

Douglas: Separated and confused. If you have children, you've undertaken to care for them. That means there's a responsibility to guide them until they're able to run their own lives. That is restricting in certain ways.

Fry: I want to get some examples of what you're talking about. Can you think of a really early example of when you had to make a statement about what you did--that you should have the same opportunity to do the same things that your older brothers did?

Douglas: In the most simple way. I never made any statement in any way that can be compared to what Rita said today. There was never any understanding of that on my part. I just wanted to act. I never made any statement about acting, except for the fact that I was going to be an actress, period. There was never any sense of liberation; it was what I wanted to do, and that was it, and that was finished; that was all there was to it.

In very childlike ways I can describe the competition. We were in Germany, we were in Baden-Baden, just before World War I. Mother was there and my youngest brother was there with his nurse. Mother and Father had hired a teacher to take the boys on bicycles (with the teacher on a bicycle, of course) down the Rhine or up the Rhine.

Before they went on this particular day, Mother was going out in a carriage (we had to go up the mountain near Baden-Baden) with the nurse and the baby; and she said she wanted me to go along and also my sister, who was two years younger. I had insisted before this that if the boys had a bicycle, I wanted a bicycle. My mother said, "Now Helen, you don't want a bicycle; what do you want with a bicycle?"

"Yes I do. The boys have a bicycle; I want a bicycle."

Douglas: So I insisted that day that I wanted to go on a bicycle; the boys were on bicycles, going up the mountain. So Mother said, "All right, you can go on your bicycle. I hope it works out all right." (I think I told you this once before.) We went up the mountain, and it was all right going up because you couldn't pedal up the mountain, you had to walk and carry the bicycle in your hands, guide the bicycle. Then we had some tea at the top of the mountain.

On the way down the boys set out and off they went on their bicycles, and I after them. But I didn't go very far before I hit a rut and some mud (it had been raining), and the bicycle twisted around and I went off and sprained my ankle. So then the carriage caught up with my prone figure. The bicycle couldn't go in the carriage, so the nurse had to get out and walk down the hill with the bicycle. She practically never spoke to me after that. And Mother never said a word. She just said, "Get in the carriage."

But there were instances of that kind; that's all. But my point is this: that nevertheless I was asserting myself, I didn't feel in any way submerged. That also was accidental. It was the fact that Mother treated us the same across the board, and the same thing with my father. The boys were never allowed to boss me or my sister around. The boys were never allowed to talk loudly to us or tell us what to do. So we were never made to feel subservient to our brothers.

Fry: It almost sounds more like an age difference than a sex difference that we're talking about here.

Douglas: Yes. It really was; it really was.

When those first Fords came out, the boys were sixteen and I suppose I was fourteen. They could pass an exam to drive at that time. Maybe they were a little bit older, but it seems to me they were sixteen, because they went to college when they were sixteen. Right around here--we never took it to New York or anything--we had a car. They drove very well, both of them, and I kept saying every day, "I want to learn to drive the car." And they said, "You can't learn to drive the car; don't be silly, you can't drive the car; a child can't drive the car."

I was determined to drive the car, so one morning I got up about six o'clock in the morning and went down. (Our house was on a hill and just below it was a garage.) I'd watched how they cranked up the car and that was rather difficult for me, to get the motor to start, but I managed to do it. I had watched very carefully what they were doing.

Douglas: I managed to back out of the garage and go down the hill, and go around the lake road, and to go onto the main highway, along the river, and to go on to the next town. I had a lovely time, following the river and going around the towns. I never stopped; I was afraid if I stopped I wouldn't be able to start again. I was very much worried that maybe the engine would stop for some reason and I wouldn't be able to crank it up again, and that I'd have to ask somebody's help. Then it would be discovered that I was driving the car when I shouldn't have been driving.

Anyway, everything went without mishap. I came back to the house about nine [o'clock], and they were playing tennis. (You walk down that road today and there's no tennis court anymore, but that was a tennis court at that time.) The boys were there and Mother was there, and there were some others there. Of course, by now they knew the car was gone and I was gone; so they realized that I had the car. So they all came yelling at me across the tennis court.

I was so startled that I put the car in reverse and just went off the road backwards, not looking even. I'd gone perfectly the whole trip without mishap, without injuring the car or myself, and now I bashed the car against a big tree. This again was an example of my determination to do what they did. It's a little more in line with women's lib today; I didn't really care whether I drove a car or not, you know. Through the years, driving a car has never really meant very much to me; I just wanted to be able to do what they were doing.

Fry: Probably the car was an important part of your play around the lake, too.

Douglas: Yes. And I think what was important in this was the experience of insisting on the opportunity to do what I wanted to do; and what I wanted to do was a reflection of what they were doing, of course, as to the bicycle and the car and that kind of exercise. It had nothing to do with the theater; nobody was thinking of the theater except me.

Independence and Commitment in Marriage

Fry: We're up to the point now where this spirit of independence has carried over to a point where you become a married woman. Apropos of your prior comments here, that of course your husband has to come first, you have been asked a lot of questions at the conferences you've been to on how does a woman who has her own busy life relate to her husband when he has his busy life? How does this work out?

Douglas: Well, concern for one another. It comes down to that. If you're living with someone, even if it isn't someone to whom you're married--if you're living with another woman, let us say--the relationship wouldn't last very long if you rode roughshod over the sensibilities of the other person. I think it's as much as that. I think that is what it is about--the sensibility, concern for the other person, so that you don't become outrageous in your disregard for the other persons living in the same house and sharing your life with you. That varies too.

Fry: You told me awhile ago that you came into your marriage expecting to be independent.

Douglas: Yes. That makes a difference, too. For instance, I wasn't married until I was thirty, and Mel was thirty. We both had established ourselves in our professions. It never occurred to me to speak about being independent! I just was, and it never occurred to me, nor did it to Mel, that I would be anything but independent my entire life. So he was very advanced, too, in this sense. I knew that he knew that I was going to be independent; we never talked about that, not ever.

Fry: It was subconscious.

Douglas: Yes, it just was. But we both have understood that choice of what one does at a given time is up to that person. For instance, we were married and we were in Los Angeles. I had one child, Peter, at that time. I went to Europe to sing in '37. It never would have occurred to me to say to Melvyn, "Is it going to be all right if I go for the concert?" We talked about it, and I said, "Well, I'll go for these months," and he said, "Yes, that's good."

I was preparing for it in the house; it was just the normal progression of what one did in one's work. People that I have known, who have both been trained in their own disciplines, have built their life on this kind of understanding.

You see, it's different, because [if] you have a couple where the woman does not have a career or a discipline, [she] feels submerged in the family relationship--taking care of the children and the husband at home isn't enough. The husband has outside interests; he has contacts that he makes daily that refresh him and keep him moving, changing and thinking new ways.

The wife, maybe, isn't a great student, isn't doing work that can be done at home, isn't a writer. Anyway, what that wife has is nothing more than the house and the children. Well, that's a lot, but it may not be enough for that person. For some women it is.

Douglas: But it may not be enough, so the wife feels submerged. She's had no experience. Now she's going to change the pattern of that life. To change the pattern of a life is quite different from entering the pattern with the understanding that there's nothing to change. Two people coming together, both of whom are independent, both of whom are self-supporting, both of whom have their own work, both of whom are successful in their own work, is a totally different situation.

You can say, was there any conflict as the years went on? No. There were certain strains. I always tried to be careful, and Melvyn's always tried to be careful, not to impose anything that wasn't necessary. Let me explain that. If I go someplace and have a big success and come back, I don't come back to the family and begin to talk about that so nobody hears about anything else.

I just don't talk about it at all, unless somebody brings it up and they say, "How did it go?" I say, "Fine." If they want to know some more about it, then I go on; but I don't make that the center of conversation. In other words, I don't assert the center of the conversation; I immediately turn to what has happened--what the children are doing (now they're grown up, of course), what's going on there; what has Melvyn done; you know, what's going on? I tie immediately in to what's happening there, and no one knows a thing.

Fry: This is kind of an unstated--

Douglas: Never was arranged; there were no formulas. You have a feel of it; you have a feel as you go along. Marriage is an experience for anyone, you know. You decide you're going to live with someone, and hope you'll be able to live with them for the rest of your life. This is an adjustment; it doesn't happen overnight. I mean, the adjustment doesn't take place overnight that builds the foundation for a lasting friendship.

Fry: There's one big question in my mind, which I must put out here. You were so successful on Broadway and in New York, and then Melvyn's success developed in Hollywood.

Douglas: No, no, no. You're confused. By the time we married, Melvyn had had a very distinguished career already. He started the long road, with a little theater of his own that he put together in Chicago; then he went on the road with Kellerd; then they were stranded on the road; then he was with other road companies; then he had a theater of his own in Wisconsin (Madison); then he went to Jessie Bonstelle's stock company (I'm just skipping quickly); then after that he played in some of the more interesting plays of that period as the leading man always. So he was established in the theater when we met. He wasn't a star; he was a leading man. But

Douglas: he was always featured. And I was a star overnight, and I think you people at the university want to know how that happened overnight.

Melvyn had experience. He'd been a top featured player; he'd been with some of the best actors, actresses, in the theater at that time, played opposite them. So there wasn't the discrepancy between where we were in our careers that there appears to be. I was a star; I had made it very quickly. Melvyn had taken the long way around. But as a result of his taking it the long way around, the foundation for Melvyn's work today is as solid as a rock. That's why he gets better and better the older he gets.

It wasn't as though I was very enormously talented, and was a star, and then I had a leading man that wasn't so talented and wasn't a star. He had so much talent, and he had so much preparation; his technique was so solid, and intellectually he was so mature, and he was so well read when I married him, more widely read than I was.

I was a reader all the time, but I was saying that his reading was more catholic--wider--and certainly politically he was more widely read than I was. I wasn't politically read at all, except as my family would ask me to read something; they thought I ought to be educated in this field as well.

I think what makes for friction, perhaps, between people is when one member of the couple feels inferior and can't accept that, and won't face it. Inferior not because they don't have the talent, but inferior in their preparation, and not able to cope, in the sense that the person they're living with is always outdistancing them; and in the sense that they always have to run to keep up and they'll never get there, and they feel belittled. In any relationship, whether it's man and wife, or brother and sister, or two brothers, or two sisters, the death of any relationship is for one member to in any way, either unknowingly or knowingly, belittle the other one.

Fry: In a way, you were always trying to keep up with your older brothers, who were two years older than you. Did you have that feeling, sometimes, of their unconsciously feeling better than you? And did this carry over with you as a particular sensitivity in your marriage, so that you maybe didn't want to do this to somebody else?

Douglas: Yes, I had the sense that they would dismiss me; the twins who were two years older, would say, "You can't do that because," one, I was a girl, and two, I was two years younger.

Did I tell you about the jolly room in the house in Brooklyn? That was what they called it--the jolly room--and that was for the boys, downstairs in the basement. Father had had it built for them. They had boxing lessons, and so I wanted to learn to box.

Douglas: My brother Frederick was so disgusted with me, he'd say, "Oh, for goodness sakes, Helen, girls don't box. What are you talking about?" And I said, "I want to box. There's no reason I can't box. You box; why can't I box?" So he said, "All right, come and box." So I went down, and he put the gloves on me and tied them up, which I was not able to do, and he said, "All right. Now I'm going to show you the way it's going to go--this way and this way and this way... Now you have to protect yourself." Well, I think he made feints, and I bumped and was out and unconscious on the floor. That was the end of my boxing, rather like the bicycling. [laughter]

But my motivation was just to be there, to be with it. It didn't have any motivation that was prompted by what was going on in the community. Do you know what I mean? For instance, girls today, I'm sure, must be influenced to some degree (girls of that age), with the fact that girls are going to be on their own. Boys play football; girls can play sports too. It wasn't that. It was just there in that family. I just saw them doing it, and I wanted to do it.

Fry: Now, Helen, the question I'm asking you, you may not be able to answer. But do you think that those experiences of yours carried over in your marriage relationship, so that you were sensitive about an unevenness like this, where one would always be struggling to keep up with the other?

Douglas: I think everything carries over, don't you? I think the very fact that one's brought up in a big family helps immeasurably in learning to live with people, and to have consideration for others and for what they want to do. I think everything carries over, some more or less. Some experiences are more influential later on than others, but I think we're marked by everything.

Fry: You can't think of any special way, for example, to apply that?

Douglas: No. It's rather the same as when you make a cake--you can taste a little bit of what's in there, but it all becomes one.

Meshing Two Careers

Fry: The question I was after awhile ago, in your and Melvyn's careers, which is in my mind is, why didn't you return to Broadway in the thirties? Was it because Melvyn had his orientation on the West Coast?

- Douglas: Oh, yes. I followed Melvyn to the West Coast, and I played there, and almost didn't marry him because he accepted the picture. An offer was made to Melvyn to play the motion picture version of Tonight or Never opposite Gloria Swanson.
- Fry: In Hollywood?
- Douglas: Yes. There was no question but that I would have said yes in the end. I loved Melvyn very much. It was an unhappy decision just the same, to go with him to the coast.
- Fry: Can you remember what it looked like to you then, when you made the decision to follow him? Did it look like you were having to give up your career? Did you think about it?
- Douglas: I didn't think about that. I didn't have to go; I didn't have to get married; I could have stayed in New York. But I knew I wouldn't be happy. So I went to the coast. I didn't think, "Now Melvyn's going to make the picture because he thinks he must make the picture; but is he thinking of my career?" That never entered my head.
- Fry: What made you consider not marrying at that time?
- Douglas: Because I thought he would continue in pictures, and I didn't like pictures at that time. He was such a fine actor, I thought he would be injuring his career by going into pictures. Of course, he was supporting his family then, and thought he had no right to turn down the offer because of the money.
- Fry: Because of a previous marriage?
- Douglas: No, no. He was supporting his mother and father; helping his brother with his family, and caring for his son. Melvyn had been briefly married in his early twenties.
- Fry: It was the economic basis for the decision?
- Douglas: Yes, that's why Melvyn went to the coast and I with him. At the very first, neither of us was very happy in Hollywood. Melvyn began at once to work in the Goldwyn studios and I in the theater. Curran produced Tonight or Never for me at this theaters in Los Angeles and San Francisco. I had played both cities when touring in Trelawney of the Wells. We didn't go back to Broadway until after the birth of our first baby in 1933. Melvyn went back to star in and I to play in Dan Totheroh's Moor Born, a play about the Bronte sisters. Melvyn directed it.
- Fry: This is back on Broadway?

Douglas: Back on Broadway. We've been in and out of Broadway ever since.

Fry: How did you work out this very practical thing of keeping both of you more or less on the same coast?

Douglas: It wasn't that difficult. I was in demand--there was no problem at all about my acting on the coast or in New York.

Following the Curran production of Tonight or Never, he produced Jerome Kern's The Cat and the Fiddle for me in 1932 and again in 1939. Under Curran's management I sang in Franz Lehar's The Merry Widow in 1936 and played in Maxwell Anderson's Mary, Queen of Scots, the role of Mary in 1934. I sang with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra while playing Tonight or Never in San Francisco in 1931.

While Mel was still playing on the coast I also sang in the opera and sang with the orchestra. So there was no difficulty that way. That would have been a different situation, you see, if there was no such thing as a theater on the coast or there was no opportunity for my playing in the theater.

Fry: Or if you hadn't been in as much demand. You could be practical.

Douglas: That's why I say, Chita, that no two cases are the same. You know they aren't, because opportunities are different and therefore the strains are not the same, and the basis for choice is not the same.

Fry: Later, when Mel came back from World War II, and you were in Congress, how did you work things out?

Douglas: That was difficult because Melvyn did not want to stay in Washington. He was in New York for a while, and he came to Washington to see me, and I went to New York to see him, of course. Then he went back to California to finish his MGM contract.

Fry: He had two more years to go?

Douglas: More than that, but I think I covered this before.

Fry: Last night, without the tape on.

Douglas: Melvyn had signed a seven-year contract with MGM a short time before he went into the army. He'd served two years of that contract. After the war, Melvyn maintained that the years that he was in service overseas should be subtracted from his contract. MGM thought otherwise. He had to go to court on the matter. Under the penal law, Mel's lawyer won the argument. The judge agreed with Melvyn. That left him three years to work out of the seven-year contract.

Fry: Were the kids in Los Angeles?

Douglas: Yes. They were at school--Chadwick--but they'd come home weekends with Melvyn. They were not with me in Washington the last two years. In the '50 campaign, Melvyn was on the road in a play, so he wasn't in California. After the election of 1950, I returned to Congress to serve until the end of the year, after which I came back to California. Melvyn was still on the road. The children were finishing their school year in Chadwick. Our house on Senalda Road was rented at the time, so I took an apartment at the Chateau Marmont. It was very popular with actors. All the apartments had kitchens and were furnished in a very homey, agreeable way.

In 1952, we returned to New York City and rented an apartment on Park Avenue, where we lived until 1959, when we moved across the city to Riverside Drive. We are still here.

Fry: By that time you were...

Douglas: Many things. I starred in The First Lady produced by the Theater Guild; began again studying with Madame Cehanovska; sang a number of concerts; travelled across the country with Basil Rathbone in a two-man performance of Chekhov and Guy De Maupassant stories dramatized by me. I was also lecturing on foreign policy. In the 1950s, I also made a study tour of the Middle East with a group of ministers which was organized by the American Christian Palestine Committee.

Fry: Wasn't Mel doing movies then?

Douglas: No, he'd finished his contract. He did a picture now and then if he liked the script, but he was no longer under contract. He refused to sign another long term contract. Such contracts gave the actor no choice as to scripts. He had to accept whatever was given him. At least that's the way the old contracts were; I don't think they're written that way anymore. I did a picture, too, but that was in the thirties, before I went to Congress.

Fry: Shortly after you arrived in Los Angeles.

Douglas: In 1935 I played She by H. Rider Haggard.

Fry: The only other question that comes to my mind as a result of this Berkshire conference, is a separateness that the women kept talking about--that a husband and wife each allow the other to have plenty of freedom to be a separate person, coming away from the romantic idea that "the two of us are one."

Douglas: If you love someone, love automatically binds you. You're automatically bound. No one has to talk about it, no one has to demand it; you are bound. Separateness I think can be described in two ways. One is separateness in the structural foundations of each life--the separateness that permits each one to pursue their work as they wish. Right?

The other is independence of spirit; independence, the real liberation, which minorities struggle for--no one can give you that but yourself; no one. And in a sense, when one is deeply in love, you already have given up part of that liberation--if it's only a subconscious concern for the other one; an awareness. But I think that's enriching. Who would want to be like a lost star out there in the sky, you know?

You're bound by your husband, by your children. When do you forget your children? Not as long as you breathe. They can be married--you know how it is with your own children--you never stop thinking of them. These relationships make for richness in living.

Working in the Theater Under Melvyn's Direction

Fry: Since you and Mel were in the same careers, how much of helping each other did you do? For instance, did either of you seek the other's advice on a script, or on how you would read?

Douglas: Yes. The normal kind of conferring took place. We each had enough self-assurance to take each other's criticism, advice and direction. Melvyn is a marvelous director; one of the finest with whom I have ever worked. I always wanted him to do more directing. Almost every play Mel's ever been in, he's had a lot to do with changes made in the play.

In Moor Born, directing me in the role of Emily, Melvyn obtained from me a quality that I wouldn't have gotten by myself. My quality would have been softer. He kept cutting away, cutting away, until there was just--well, how can I describe it? I'm not describing it well. I don't know whether you know the Bronte play. It wasn't a great play, but it had quality; it was a play that I loved very much. I refused any number of plays that season. It was right after the birth of Peter, our first child.

Melvyn directed Moor Born. It was produced for very little money--\$6,000; a ridiculous sum--and yet it was beautifully done. It was possible in 1933-1934, to produce a play for a modest sum

Douglas: if knowledgeable people were in charge. It is impossible today. It makes my kind of self-indulgence, doing only the plays I liked even though financial success is risky, difficult.

Fry: You can't go all out.

Douglas: No. The cost of production today prohibits experimentation and limits the production of beautiful, though not commercial, plays.

There was a scene in Moor Born that I particularly liked. The only brother of the Brontes is brought home ill, drunk and dying. The sisters greet him, Emily, Jane and Anne. As Totheroh wrote the play, Emily is the strong sister in the family.

Fry: Emily Bronte?

Douglas: Yes. The brother, Bramwell, played by Glen Anders, slumps to the floor. Emily, crying out, "On your feet, Bramwell," lifts him. He has so humiliated himself she feels he must at least die on his feet. Mel worked with me on that scene when we were alone at home over and over. He'd say, "No, no. It's still soft, Helen, that's not the way to play it. You've got it in you; do it." And he was right! He had that capacity as a director.

Comparison of Directors and Productions

Douglas: You asked me last night whether I liked soft or hard direction. I don't care how critical a director is, if he or she knows what they're talking about. Madame Cehanovska was a most severe critic, and a most exacting teacher. She placed my voice and coached me in the operatic roles I sang. She was severe, but so extraordinarily talented that I knew everything she was saying was right. If I knew I was going in the right direction, nothing a teacher or director could say would humiliate me. But if the direction in the theater was confusing--if I thought the director didn't know what he was talking about--then I would be restive and unhappy.

Fry: Did you prefer a very detailed directing, as opposed to a director who gives you an overall idea of what a line is supposed to get across? As you say, Mel would make it harder and harder.

Douglas: I prefer that kind of a director.

Fry: The latter?

Douglas: Yes. You asked me some questions last night about Belasco. You said the university [drama department] was interested. Belasco directed in a way that I found very helpful, especially for the play in which he directed me, Tonight or Never.

Tonight or Never is really a very superficial play about two people, an opera diva and a representative of the Metropolitan Opera. They meet. They fall in love. The diva has never been considered a great singer because she lacks passion. She's never been in love. She has an affair with the man from the Metropolitan Opera who is looking for singers, finds love, and experiences passion. She sings at the end of the play the aria from Tosca. Her heart and soul are in it. She's made the leap, lost her virginity, with the result of released emotions and great feeling in her voice.

So how did Belasco direct this great masterpiece? I had my script and studied it, of course. When I came to the first rehearsal, the stage was laid out with furniture in the position that they would be in when the production was presented. The artifacts that I would work with on stage were there from the first day of rehearsal. For instance, a teapot and teacups, some books and other things. They were all there.

Belasco would say, "Miss Helen, what kind of teacups do you like? Do you feel happy with that one in your hand? I want you to bring some of your own to the theater tomorrow." So I brought to the theater a tea service and some books (I've forgotten now), some little whatnots that I had on tables at home. The piano was there from the first day. The play opens with me singing and my coach playing. I'm doing exercises when the curtain goes up. I wore long dresses in the play, and almost from the first, I was wearing a long dress with a train. All of which had only to do with the mechanics.

At our first rehearsal, Belasco showed us where I would be, but if he thought I was uncomfortable, he'd say, "Are you comfortable there, Miss Helen?" Melvyn wasn't in that act. Because I was the star, Belasco always deferred to me first of all: "Are you comfortable now? Do you like that? What kind of a couch would you be comfortable resting on?" (Part of the time in the first act I was lying on the couch.) Belasco did everything to make me feel physically at home in that setting--to make me feel it was my room, which I thought was interesting. Now, that's been done since, but I don't think in as great detail as Belasco.

I don't remember very much his direction as being more than just general lines. I do remember the scene in the second scene of the second act, where I go to the impressario's apartment to have supper, at the end of which I fall into his arms.

- Douglas: That last scene, which has to suggest intimacy at the end of it, was never rehearsed, up until almost the end of the rehearsal period. So I said to Mr. Belasco one day at luncheon (every day he would invite me to have it with him up in his apartment, which used to disturb Melvyn because Belasco's reputation wasn't very good. Melvyn needn't have been disturbed, I can assure you.)
- Fry: I've been told he had a beautiful apartment. Wasn't it above the stage?
- Douglas: Yes, up above the Belasco Theater. We went upstairs on an elevator to his great big apartment at the top of the theater.
- Fry: With Persian rugs--
- Douglas: Yes, and everything else. Very richly decorated, if you know what I mean. There were too many chairs, too many tables, many, many paintings, too much art, many artifacts.

Anyway, one day at luncheon I said, "Mr. Belasco, we really must rehearse that scene. I'd kept asking him when we were going to do the end of the second scene. [He replied] "We'll do it, Miss Helen, we'll get to it." So then I said to him this day, "Mr. Belasco, you know, we really have to do that scene. My goodness, we've only got a few days left. Why don't you rehearse that scene?"

He said, "Well, Miss Helen, you want me to really tell you why?"

I said, "Why?"

[He said] "I'm embarrassed to ask you to play that scene the way I want it played."

I said, "Embarrassed? Why are you embarrassed?"

"Well," he said, "you know why I wanted you to do this play."

I said, "Well, I knew you wanted me to do this play because I can act and sing."

"Oh, yes," he said, "I know. But there were some singers at the Metropolitan whom I could have had, who are actresses and singers, and beautiful. But who would believe they were virgins?" (I think I told you this once before.) He said, "The whole play hangs on that--that she's a virgin. Then when she ceases to be a virgin, she has the soul that's needed to make her singing come alive."

Douglas: I said, "Oh, you're talking about the scene I've played so many times in Tosca--the attempted rape scene with Scarpia?"

He put his head back and laughed and said, "You mean you've played it, Miss Helen?"

I said, "Of course I have. I know exactly--if that's the way you want it." (I didn't know what he wanted.) "If that's the way you want, I can show you how we ought to do it--how it's very comfortable, and looks as if something's going on and it really isn't." I'll never forget how he laughed at that. It was very, very amusing.

He was very gentle. Of course, he was an old man. I had no problems with him at all--not one. Then (I hate the thought that I might be repeating all the time) he was ill during the course of the play in New York. He came to see the play one day after he was well enough to visit the theater. He died shortly after.

Belasco was not the kind of strong director that Melvyn is. Melvyn directed in a big pattern. He didn't talk about what you did with a line or what you did with your body, or whatever, except in the big, overall sense.

Fry: The minute details--

Douglas: No, no, no. Not Mel. Herman Shumlin is a very strong director. Mel worked for him in a number of plays. We both admire his work. His direction is exacting and sometimes disturbing to supporting actors. He gives the overall pattern but then he also directs details (but not with Melvyn or a star of his capability). You take one step; you stop.

It was just the opposite with Belasco. If I wanted to walk across the whole stage and back again at some point in the play, it was all right with Belasco. He wanted me to be absolutely relaxed and at home in every scene. That's what the play needed, you see, to make it live. The audience had to believe the characters were real, though they were seeing them in a frivolous play. I think we were able to achieve reality.

Fry: Do you think that he was able to adapt his directing to a particular actress or actor? He wanted you to bring your own personal artifacts and was eager to defer to your comfort and possibly your style.

Douglas: I don't know, because I only had that one experience with Belasco.

The only time I heard Belasco raise his voice was at the dress rehearsal, and then he screamed at the technicians, who were superb. (I'm sure he had the best technicians in the theater, the best

Douglas: lighting men in the theater, the best stage manager, I'm sure, in the whole theater. They were extraordinary.) He screamed and yelled at them, and I walked off the stage. When he finished screaming he said quietly, "Where's Miss Helen?" Ask her to come back." I told the manager when he came for me, "You go tell Mr. Belasco I'll come back when he stops screaming." The manager said, "He's not screaming at you."

I said, "I know he's not screaming at me, but it makes me very nervous, all that screaming."

Fry: Did he calm down?

Douglas: He did.

Fry: That falls in line with what the drama historians were telling me. One of them remembers that people went to one play that he put on just to see the scene change from twilight gradually into night (or maybe it was night into morning).

Douglas: Yes. Louis Hartman was the electrician heading the Belasco lighting unit. He was a genius. He created the Belasco lighting miracles. The prop man was just as outstanding. Belasco would tell them what he wanted and they would create it. The theater staff had been with Belasco for many years. They were all superb technicians. Belasco would stop our dress rehearsal for hours until the lighting effect he wanted was just right. Brady's lighting was very rough by comparison.

Fry: On my notes here I have that George Tyler produced Anna Christie for the first time. I don't think that has anything to do with you.

Douglas: No. I was under contract to George Tyler. George Tyler produced Trelawney of the Wells with an all-star cast, sixteen actors, eight old, eight young. I played Rose Trelawney; that was in 1926-27. At the end of the road tour, Mother and I went to Europe. I spent the summer studying with Madame Cehanovska in Reichenhall, Germany, returning to New York in the fall. I was expected to do a play for Tyler and to start rehearsing at once.

Instead I went to him and asked to be released from my five-year contract. He was utterly disgusted when he heard I wanted to be a singer. He said, did I know how long it would take to be a singer? I said yes, I probably had some idea, but I still wanted to be a singer. He released me. I said I would come back and act for him for nothing any time he needed me. He said for me to go if I was determined to sing and leave the theater to the "kitchen mechanics," [laughs] which was exactly his expression.

Fry: Did this mean the other people on Broadway?

Douglas: I imagine. I didn't stop to inquire. I just knew I had been released, and out I went. That winter he did call me--I guess it was '28 (I don't know how these dates go)--and said that I had offered to help him if he was in trouble, and he was in trouble. He was producing Diplomacy with an all-star cast, and he had engaged a star to come from England to play Countess Zika. She had failed him, and he needed me to play that part. So I said, "Oh, now? Right now?" He said, "Yes, now, Helen."

So I went into the Diplomacy rehearsal. We played in New York and then went on the road. Trelawney and Diplomacy were the only two plays that I did under the management of George Tyler, neither one of which he directed.

At the time Tyler produced Macbeth, I wasn't working in the theater. The production of Macbeth was very costly. It was not very well received. Tyler needed cash to continue the run in New York. He hoped if he could keep it on the boards a little longer, it might build an audience.

I was studying with Madame Cehanovska at the beginning of 1929. Tyler asked to see me. I went to his theater to see him. He said, "Do you suppose your father would give me some money?" I didn't allow as how I thought father would give him any money, so I said, "What do you need?"

He said, "I need \$5,000 right away."

I said, "I'll give you \$5,000."

Fry: Oh, yes, we have that story.

Douglas: So that has to do with George Tyler. He was a very agreeable man, though a very pessimistic man. I remember we met him once when Mother and I were in Europe, and Mother thought, "Oh, my goodness, we're not going to have dinner with that dreary man again tonight, are we? He's the most pessimistic man I ever met in my life."

He was always talking about age. The thought of aging, coming to the end of his life, was very sad for him. I remember he said to me once, "You know, you just begin to fall apart. Kidneys don't work--you just fall apart." But he was very inclined to be pessimistic and depressed in his conversations. Otherwise he was a very agreeable and a very gentle man.

Now, Brady was an Irishman, through and through. He could be rough and tough. He directed every play I did for him. What did I do for him? I did Dreams for Sale and Leah Kleschna, which was,

Douglas: again, an all-star cast, and I played Leah. No, I'm mistaken. Brady produced Dreams for Sale, Leah Kleschna with an all-star cast, and Chains. Brady directed Dreams for Sale, but he hired Jessie Bonstelle to direct Leah.

Bonstelle wanted me to join her stock company in Detroit. She had a very popular theater there--you remember, Katherine Cornell and Melvyn both worked for some years for Bonstelle's stock company.

Fry: What did you think about joining it?

Douglas: I had no intention of doing so. I liked her but I wasn't particularly drawn to her.

Fry: Can I ask you something about Leah Kleschna? What kind of director was Jessie Bonstelle? Was she more like Belasco?

Douglas: No. I can't remember her direction really in any detail. I wasn't particularly taken with it, that I do remember. Bonstelle achieved a very decent performance of Leah, but then she had a cast of top stars: William Faversham, Lowell Sherman, Arnold Daly who brought Shaw to this country, to mention a few. So she could hardly go wrong.

I do remember vividly Sir Basil Dean's direction, the English director who was in charge of Young Woodley. When Brady couldn't find a play that I liked, he kindly, graciously, and understandingly, loaned me out to other producers. He didn't lose money on this: if another producer wanted me badly enough, he would pay what Brady asked.

Young Woodley was John Van Druten's play, all about a headmaster far along in years, married to a young and beautiful woman. He was cold, routinely professional, unemotional. She was simple, loving and direct. All the students were fond of her. She made regular calls to their recreation center; at one such visit, she noticed a student, sensitive, poetic in type, who seemed to feel out of place among the other young men.

In one of the last scenes of the play, the young poetic student is having tea with Paula, the headmaster's wife. He tells her that he has fallen in love with her. Her response is that of the proper wife of a headmaster. She talks to him gently and explains that what he feels is an affection for her, that it is a natural part of their friendship, that he mustn't exaggerate, and so forth (I've forgotten the exact words).

Now to get back to Basil Dean, and why I remember him. He had an extraordinary sense of what he wanted out of a scene, the final effect of a scene, and the message that he wanted an actor to convey

Douglas: to an audience. His problem came in trying to convey to an actor what he wanted. We were working on the tea scene at the end of the play; he would talk about it. I felt that what he wanted was right, but I couldn't understand what it was.

Paula gets up to leave the young student. There has been nothing in the scene to indicate that she too has been deeply touched. But when she leaves the room, the audience must know as a certainty that, in seclusion, she will sob her heart out, for the love she misses.

Basil worked so long on that scene. One day he said, "You know, Helen, you have the most doubting eyes I ever looked into. Are you listening to me?" I said, "I am. I'm listening very closely, but I don't understand what you want me to do. I'd like to do it, because I think that what you want is right. But you are not telling me what you want." I finally achieved what Basil wanted, but it wasn't easy.

Fry: It sounds like he needed a lot of help from his actors as he went along.

Douglas: Yes. And he did have good actors in Young Woodley. He had good actors in England where he had established a reputation as a good director.

Bill Brady, of course, was very disturbing for actors because he would very often get roaring drunk on opening night. That wasn't conducive to quiet, serene self-confidence. [laughs] He was married, of course, to Grace George, who was small, petite, exquisite in her person. Everything about her--their home, everything was porcelain-like. How this bull of a man fitted into that background I will never know. He adored her.

In a sense he discovered me, you know. I did a play for Cromwell; went right from college on to the stage. Brady saw me after I had been in it for a few days, and sent for me to do the star role in a play for him. In the rehearsal he would call out, "Grace, Grace, do you think this, or this, or this...", especially where my clothes were concerned. He'd say, "Now, be very nice to Miss George. She can help you. She really knows about clothes, and how you should be dressed." I was a big girl, you know, tall, and I wasn't skinny.

After Dreams for Sale, my first starring vehicle, closed, Brady loaned me to another manager to play the female lead in a play by Franz Molnár. Dreams for Sale had only played two weeks but my notices in it established me overnight as an actress. After a successful run of Molnár's play, Fashions for Men, in

Douglas: New York, it opened in Chicago for a long run. While playing in it I began to run a low-grade fever. The doctor that Mother took me to put me on a very strict diet. I ate my starches at breakfast, and at my next meal, which was never later than five or five fifteen on matinee days, broiled meat, a vegetable and salad. After the theater, only fruit. My fever went back to normal and I lost pound after pound.

The night after the Molnar play closed, I opened in Chains. I rehearsed while playing Fashions for Men, as actors do in stock.

When Chains went to New York and Grace George saw me opening night, she was disgusted and complained bitterly to her husband, Bill Brady. "That silly girl has reduced, why? Who got hold of her? Why did she think she ought to lose weight? She was heavier than most actresses, but she was beautiful. Now, she looks anemic." Brady came backstage and asked why I'd reduced; who put me on a diet. I told him I didn't go on a diet; the doctor ordered the diet in order to stop the low-grade fever.

Brady loaned me to play in George Tyler's Diplomacy, with an all-star cast. We made a tour across the country, ending in Albany, where, before the performance, a man came backstage and asked to speak to Margaret Anglin, one of the stars in the cast. She sent back word--her dressing room was across the hall from mine, and I could hear every word she said because she talked very loudly--"Tell him I can't see him; I can't see anyone before the performance." Word came back that he was her cousin. She said, "I don't care who he is. I'm not going to see him."

In the second act, when I was on stage alone with Coburn, a handsome, elegantly dressed man came down the aisle and demanded, "Go get Miss Anglin." No one was disturbed in the audience; they simply thought it was part of the play. I thought, "Oh God! That must be the man who came backstage to see Margaret. He's angry; I mustn't say a word. If I answer him, he'll probably blurt out why he wants to see Margaret, and that will embarrass her." So I sat calmly, looking at the intruder, hoping someone backstage would pull the curtain.

Coburn was walking up and down. He was rather a pompous fellow. Finally he saw something had to be done, and he decided he was going to do it. He walked down to the footlights and said, "My good man, what do you want?" Whereupon the good man yelled, "You keep out of this!" And with that, he flipped a revolver out of his pocket, pointed it at me and said, "Will you go get Margaret Anglin?"

At that, a man in the second row jumped over his neighbor into the aisle, and knocked the arm of the intruder, and the gun went off in the air. The curtain finally came down; it had taken that long

Douglas: for the stage hands and the stage manager to realize that the action they had been watching wasn't part of the play. I can tell you, when the curtain finally came down, I was shaking from head to foot.

On tour, Frances Starr, Margaret and I had been receiving letters from a man who obviously seemed sick, mentally. They were sex-oriented and pretty obscene. He demanded that we leave the Eagle Theater, and give ourselves back to God. Frances and Margaret tore up their letters. After I had opened one or two, I turned over all the other letters, unopened, to the stage manager.

The gentleman who had come down the aisle was the man who had been writing us letters. He'd been traveling with us, on the train, from city to city across the country. He came from a well-to-do family; they knew he was mentally disturbed, but he had never been violent. They didn't want to put him in an institution.

Diplomacy for some reason upset him. That particular night, when he came down the aisle, he was determined to talk to Margaret Anglin. It was my unopened letters that showed how very sick the man was.

Fry: That was pretty intelligent of you to keep the letters.

Douglas: Well I didn't plan it that way. I just didn't want to read them--even open them.

Fry: What kept you from destroying them?

Douglas: I don't know what I thought at the time. It was one of those accidents. I don't know why I turned those letters over to the stage manager, except that I didn't want to touch them.

Well, the other day, I received a letter from the man who had jumped into the aisle; he asked if I remembered Albany, and the acclaim I received from the newspapers for remaining calm and preventing panic in the theater.

Then one Christmas, our scenery didn't arrive. We were someplace in the Middle West, touring with an all-star cast in Trelawny of the Wells, and there was a snowstorm. We didn't have costumes, we didn't have scenery; and on a bare stage, we went out and acted.

Then, of course, on occasion cats ran across the stage, to the delight of the audience. I'm trying to think what else may have happened to upset a performance. There was a man--did I tell you this before? I can't bear it if I'm repeating these things.

Fry: No, you're not, I assure you.

Douglas: In the tour of Trelawny of the Wells, we had our own private car, and it would be attached to a train as we went across the country. We went up to Canada, we went all the way across the country. Each one of us had our own stateroom. It was rather like moving in a traveling apartment.

Fry: Did William A. Brady have much less attention to detail in general in his direction?

Douglas: Yes, but he had a fine imagination and he loved the theater. He produced a most interesting Czech play by the Capek brothers. It was all about bugs. Instead of writing a play about the weaknesses of people, the characters were bugs. Brady had imagination, in some ways, more than Belasco. Most of Belasco's plays were pretty second rate, you know, even though they were successful. He dressed them up so beautifully.

Fry: Straight down the road, as real as they can get?

Douglas: Right. Belasco was creative in the presentation of a play; in the design of the scenery; the lighting, the artifacts. He achieved extraordinary effects.

Fry: It sounds like Brady was more able to develop the theater as an art form.

Douglas: No, not really. Not in the way of theater today. Of course neither Belasco nor Brady had backgrounds preparing them to be producers. Brady had something to do with prize fighting in his early years.

Fry: On my notes I have that William A. Brady was very important, but a sort of gaslight drama type?

Douglas: Right.

Fry: I don't quite know what that means.

Douglas: He liked melodramas. So did Belasco, but he produced them in a more refined way; that was the difference between them.

Fry: How early did you start singing in musicals? Was it before you had your opera training?

Douglas: No, afterwards.

Fry: It was all afterwards? I asked you last night about dance, and you said that you had danced.

Douglas: Oh, yes, I had dancing lessons in early years, and then when I went to Barnard I danced there. Bird Larson, a student of Martha Graham, was head of the dance department at college. She was a very fine teacher. Later, she had her own studio on Lexington Avenue in New York City. I worked with her again three times a week when playing in Young Woodley. At Barnard she produced the yearly Greek games which were so highly praised.

Fry: Was this your first introduction into what came to be known as modern dance?

Douglas: Yes.

Fry: Before that it had been what? Ballet?

Douglas: Ballet, yes. You know the kind of training kids get in school. I've forgotten now whether we had a special teacher for that or not.

Fry: When was the first time you danced on the stage?

Douglas: I didn't dance on the stage, except a waltz in The Merry Widow. For instance, in Cavalleria Rusticana, when her lover goes into the church to get rid of her. She follows him and begs him not to go-- not to leave her, not to abandon her. He throws her down the stairs. Well, I knew how to fall. The same thing in Aida, when I used to be thrown across the stage by my father, Amonasro. I wasn't hurt. I'm trying to think of other plays where the fact that I knew how to use my body helped.

Fry: The two professors that I've talked to mentioned, and I noticed also in clippings of your plays, it is frequently mentioned how gracefully you moved.

Douglas: That is because of the dancing.

Fry: That was kind of a trademark, it seems.

Douglas: Of course, in the early years in Vermont in the summertime, we had teachers, one at a time. One year a piano teacher, another year it was a woman who gave us voice work and special calisthenics. All the body work and the training we had helped.

I think one can sense when an actress is on the stage, whether her body is answering to her emotions. I think dancing and all body training helps that; so that whatever you're feeling is expressed through the body. I think that probably was something that was noticed in the plays and opera performances by critics.

Fry: Just an unconscious thing.

Douglas: Yes. And your body responds. In other words, your lack of control becomes obvious through a kind of awkwardness. The plasticity of an actress is the result of training; the body is just behaving the way it should be. If you are tense and nervous, your body is tense and nervous; but if you're relaxed, your body's relaxed. The very way you walk, the way you turn. Whenever I played in costume plays, demanding trains or long gowns, it was always very easy for me to move, because I had done that. I could always move in heavy costumes with ease, and I wasn't conscious of the costumes.

Fry: It was automatic reaction to the restrictions.

Douglas: It was training.

Fry: That must have helped you, too, right on through to opera, where you have to control your breathing, but at the same time move about.

Douglas: Oh, very much. And not to be self-conscious in the roles, because again, you see, I went from the studio onto the operatic stage. There was no time to get acquainted with Tosca's clothes, or Aida's clothes, or Manon Lescaut's clothes. I had to feel at home in them at once.

Fry: The opera notices and so forth also mention that you can act.

Douglas: You know what I told you, the first time that I sang in public was at Bad Reichenhall, Germany, in Bavaria. It was a concert, with a piano, not with an orchestra. My teacher came back after the first half of the program, when I bowed and went backstage, thinking I had done quite well. She came back and said, "What's the matter with you? You're not breathing correctly. You're breathing way up here at the top of your chest. What's the matter?"

I said, "I didn't know I was breathing badly."

She said, "Let me see your dress. Don't you have any wits about you? Are you so vain? How can you have a dress made so tight that you can't breathe? Don't you know that breathing is singing?"

So she undid my dress and ripped open the middle of it, from below the first hook to the waist, and for the rest of the time I'd go out and then I'd back out--I couldn't let anybody see my back. But I breathed very nicely then, and sang the way she wanted me to sing. I'll never forget that. It was funny. And I always was aware of that, before then, when I was in the theater--not to have dresses that were too tight or made me conscious of the dress. You should forget yourself; forget your dress--it should be a part of you.

- Fry: When you made your one movie, She, you mentioned earlier--and I think this is about the only thing you ever said about it--that you didn't like the acting before cameras, because you were constantly being stopped for clothing adjustment and things like this.
- Douglas: And I was self-conscious with those machines in front of me all the time. I suppose that if I had stayed with pictures I would have become accustomed to them. But the constant attention that was given to the way the hair looks, the way the face looks, was the dress just right, were there creases, I found very inhibiting and annoying.
- Fry: Are you stopped frequently in movies, as opposed to doing something straight through on the stage?
- Douglas: Yes, definitely you're stopped. But you're stopped because they take a short scene; then they change the cameras. And every time they change the camera, the makeup girl or the makeup man, and the girl in charge of your hair, and all the others, began to fuss over you. So that gets to be pretty tiresome for me. Have we about covered that?

VI AFTER 1950--PUBLIC WORK AND A VERMONT HOME

The American Christian Palestine Committee

Fry: I was going to move on here to your work in the American Christian Palestine Committee, which I think started in the forties?

Douglas: Yes. It may have even started at the end of the thirties--not with the American Christian Palestine Committee. I didn't become the vice-chairman of that until I went to Congress. Old Senator Wagner was the chairman, and I became the vice-chairman of the National American Christian Palestine Committee--but not until I went to Congress.

Melvyn and I had, in our trip around the world in 1932, visited old Palestine. We had visited, under the guidance of the Jewish Agency, what is Israel today. We were tremendously impressed with what the Jews were doing there. We were aware of what Hitler was doing in the following years; we were aware of the fact that it was very difficult for those fleeing from Germany in the early days to find a home for themselves. So I supported those who were bringing the facts to the public at large, and I supported the migration of Jews to old Palestine and to the United States. Now, we didn't accept them at one time, you know.

So I was already interested in this work before I went to Congress, which is why they then came to me and said would I be vice-chairman with Wagner of the American Christian Palestine Committee, made up of congressmen. After leaving Congress, I was on the board of the American Christian Palestine Committee, made up primarily of ministers, until it was dissolved a few years ago. So where are we now? Seventy-four--I think it was dissolved in 1970.

Fry: When you said that earlier you supported it, in what form did you support it?

Douglas: Well, the American Christian Palestine Committee basically was made up of ministers--Christian ministers--and it was the Christian philosophy, you know. So we would talk. We would talk, we would issue statements, we would support legislation that had to do with the Jews, where it was necessary.

When the British left Palestine and the war took place, and then the Jews wanted to be independent, I supported nationhood for Israel--I mean, the obvious work. And what's interesting is that they were Christian ministers.

Fry: Yours was, then, primarily speaking?

Douglas: Speaking, and when I was in Congress, supporting any measures that related to them that I thought were constructive.

Fry: Then when you were out of Congress?

Douglas: I continued to work, and went on study tours, in the fifties. I went on a study tour of the Middle East mostly with ministers. There were a few lay people, but primarily ministers. We went to Egypt, Cyprus, Israel--I think that's it.

Fry: What did you do with this study tour when you got back?

Douglas: I was lecturing all the time. Really, my field was foreign policy, in the Congress. I had been concerned with foreign policy before I went to Congress. In lecturing, I wanted to know what was going on around the world. So I went to the Middle East to see, I went to South America a number of times. I made a big study tour in South America; it was arranged so that I could lecture about it, come back and explain. Because I've always believed that we're not going to solve any of the problems or be intelligent in understanding what is happening in other areas of the world if we don't have first hand information.

Fry: So you incorporated this into your lectures that you had already been signed up for?

Douglas: Yes.

Campaigning for Other Democrats

Fry: Do you want to go into what you did in Adlai's 1952 and 1956 campaigns?

Douglas: Talked. Talked. If you're in doubt, "I talked." But that meant, always study. You can't just talk in a vacuum. So that meant that at all times keeping up with what we were supporting, what we were doing, where we fell short, what the Republicans were supporting or what they

Douglas: were opposing--where I felt they fell short. I had nothing to do with organization, which is probably what you want to know. I had nothing to do with organization in my own campaigns, I had nothing to do with organization in the national campaigns. Now remember, I worked in national campaigns for the presidency from 1940 on, with the exception of Hubert Humphrey's campaign. In that campaign I made a few tapes at the very end for Hubert, but that was all; I didn't campaign.

Fry: Was that limited because of his stand on the Vietnam War?

Douglas: Yes, and then the Chicago convention. I was so disheartened by it all. I just wasn't able to go out to people and say, "Come and support." I didn't know where he'd stand. I thought he had been very, very lacking in what was needed at the time, although goodness knows I didn't think Nixon was any good. I think it was a mistake, now. I think I should have. I thought then and I think today, that Hubert was a very fine legislator.

I think he was out of his depth when he sought the presidency-- became vice-president. He was so much a party man that when it came to the point of judging his own party he just didn't have the capacity. And Lyndon Johnson was very strong then, very persuasive. You had to really be firm in your own convictions to withstand his persuasiveness.

Fry: As when, Helen?

Douglas: Well, in everything. I mean, his whole conversation--the whole way he would try to prove his position, or try to prove to you that he was right on a given issue.

Fry: Was there any place that you tangled with Lyndon Johnson when you were in Congress?

Douglas: Not really, not really, no. He believed, and said so in one press conference shortly after he was president, when they asked something about compromise, I guess, that compromise was essential now and then. Then he used me as an example. He said, "Helen Douglas would be in the Congress today, if she had been willing to compromise; it was shortsighted of her not to compromise."

Well, that's a point of view, and in some cases I think compromise is essential in adjusting a program that both parties can live with. But I think in certain instances compromise is not possible. I think if you're in a war that you should never have undertaken, which is being misrepresented--arrived at illegally--there is no possibility for compromise.

Fry: Was he speaking about your stand on oil, do you think?

Douglas: Nothing specific; he was just talking generally.

Fry: That you were an uncompromising person, generally.

Douglas: Right. Lyndon generally thought that I had much to give, and that I'd been right on issue after issue.

Working with Adlai Stevenson and Dean Acheson at the United Nations

Fry: When did you first get to know Adlai Stevenson, or become acquainted with him?

Douglas: We started on the same committee, but I think I've told you that, in the United Nations. But I knew him, of course, way before that. I can't remember when we first met.

Fry: At any rate, by the time 1952 came, you knew each other.

Douglas: Oh yes, I knew him well. Well, in '46 we worked together at the U.N. on the same committee.

Fry: Your being on the Foreign Relations Committee could have brought you in contact with him.

Douglas: No, he didn't come before our committee. We had a little contretemps because the administration was determined to cut off UNRRA and they were going to announce that fact at that first session of the United Nations. I was opposed to that, and I was opposing it within the delegation. So Adlai came to me one day and said, "Helen, Dean Acheson wants to talk to you." Dean Acheson was on the phone in Washington, D.C. He said, "Helen, what are you doing?"

I said, "What do you mean, 'what am I doing?'"

He said, "You're opposing the cutoff of UNRRA. We have no choice but to cut off UNRRA."

I said, "Dean, it's all wrong," and I began to tell him why I thought it was wrong at that moment, to do it the way we were doing it. I thought the time was wrong and I thought the way we were doing it was not right at all.

He said, "Helen, we have no choice. The only reason we were able to get UNRRA by the second time was to promise the Senators we wouldn't bring UNRRA before them for the third time. Now, you're not a free agent, as you were in the Congress; you have to do what you're told there in the delegation. So stop opposing this program!"

Douglas: Well, that wasn't the end of it. I said, "All right, Dean, but I know it's wrong." Adlai was to make the speech announcing the cut-off of UNRRA a few days later, at the gathering of the Economic and Social Council. He went off to New Jersey, to make a speech about the United Nations. It left me, as his partner--or as the U.S. representative--on that committee with him, to work with the advisers from the State Department on the statement he was to make the next day. It was sent to me in the morning and when I got to my room at the hotel I read it, and I was shocked beyond belief.

It was an affront to everyone there in the way it was worded. So when I met with the State Department representative that afternoon, about five o'clock--they thought it would be a short meeting--I said, "This is the most outrageous statement I ever heard. We won't have a friend left in the world."

One of the chief State Department men said, "What?"

I said, "No! We won't have a friend!"

"Well," he said, "what have we said, except that we've given them this help and now we're going to cut it off?"

I said, "Exactly. You can't say it that way, not after what they've been through in Europe. We did that; you don't have to say it. If you had helped somebody in your community, if it was an individual, you wouldn't when they came to you still in need, say, 'We helped you before; now it's finished.' It just can't be done that way."

Well, we didn't end that meeting until twelve o'clock at night, and every sentence was discussed, I on one side and the group of twenty-four or twenty-five on the other side. But although it was outrageous, it was at least a respectable statement that Adlai had to make the next day.

First of all, LaGuardia addressed the Economic and Social Council, describing the conditions in Europe, in the most warm and detailed way. After his talk, then the various nations spoke, and then the United States spoke and Adlai gave his speech. After it, LaGuardia walked around the table, bristling. He didn't talk to Adlai at all, but he came to me and he said, "You know better. Why did you go along with this? Why did you go along with this, Helen? You know better."

What could I say? Yes, I did know better. I've often wondered if, a number of years later, I would just have resigned from the delegation at that point. But I don't think it would have done any good; I don't think so. I think there are certain restraints that you must observe; and I think Dean was right when he said,

Douglas: "You're not on your own; you're representing the United States government." But I think it was a mistake. I think we shouldn't have abruptly ended UNRRA as we did.

Anyway, what did we do? UNRRA was a united effort, within the United Nations. We went into the Congress and had to have short term programs to aid these same people, whom we'd cut off from UNRRA, but we didn't do it as a nation in cooperation with other nations of the world. I think it was the first of our undermining and turning away from the United Nations. And, as [in] anything in life, you take a small step in the wrong direction; you will go very far afield from your original intention.

Fry: That in a way was a personal compromise for you.

Douglas: Yes it was. It wasn't so much a compromise as that I gave in to the fact that I didn't have the authority. It wasn't a compromise. It was carried out exactly as the administration wanted it to be carried out. It was an agreement to which I was not a party. And there have been other members on the United Nations delegations who are in the same way restricted--country after country. They all follow the program of their country; they're not free to do otherwise. Someday we may have a parliament of man, I don't know, where each person would be independent. But that's not what the United Nations is today. You can work within your delegation; you can go back to the government and argue independently. But you can't change policy in the U.N.

Fry: When did you first become aware of the Kennedys and their power in the Democratic party?

Douglas: Really, not until the convention--not until he was the nominee. Jack Kennedy was not outstanding in the House of Representatives. You knew he was there in the Senate--certain stands he took having to do with foreign affairs. But it was a surprise to me that he was a candidate, and I was not at that particular time keeping up with the political developments as I had in years past, you know. Had I been keeping up with them, I would have known that they were working around the country. But for me it was a surprise; I'm sure it was for many people.

Fry: What did you think about, for instance, the way he won the nomination in 1960. I mean the primary in Virginia, I believe it was, from Hubert Humphrey, by just saturating the state with money and workers? Were you aware of that at the time, in the primaries?

Douglas: I think there has to be a limitation on the amount of money spent in a campaign. I think there have to be major reforms in the way money is collected for campaigns, or we're going to have a government that's

Douglas: up for the highest bidder! And wherever a candidate has vast sums of money, they will saturate a state, you see? What happens then is that the voter is subliminally influenced, and the voter is being manipulated without realizing it, because of this saturation technique.

Fry: By sheer name recognition.

Douglas: Name recognition and whatever issue they're pressing; you only hear one side again and again and again. The other candidate can't get around fast enough. I think as long as campaigns can spend as much money as they want to spend, one way or another, we are in danger of losing our democratic--our electoral--process that supports our form of government. We must be insistent on seeing that these changes are made.

It's outrageous that the House of Representatives would not agree to the kind of regulations they set for the White House, which in themselves are not perfect. But the Senate was willing to go along with it, and the House of Representatives didn't want to! They want campaigning to remain just the way it is. And I don't think we can accept that. I think we ought to ask every candidate running for office what they think about it, and what they would do. The example that a few congressmen have set--running for the Senate in the country today--as to the limitation of funds they would accept is very, very helpful. I'm distressed that now and then you read in the press that this is a publicity stunt. You know, this is so cynical.

Fry: It's a very real limitation on them.

Douglas: It's a very real limitation, and it suggests that campaigning must be financed as it has been in the past; to suggest anything else is to be very Pollyanna-ish--it's to be hardheaded to say it can't go on. Because it doesn't mean that a congressman sells his votes, whether he's in the House or the Senate, in the usual way; it isn't as if someone went in and bought the vote over the counter.

But if a man receives \$50,000 from someone to help elect him to the House of Representatives, that man who gives him the \$50,000 must have interests someplace--unless he's a retired person who gives the \$50,000 with no strings attached. We have some who do. But they're not common. Therefore, the donor has certain interests, and they may conflict with the general good. It doesn't mean that the congressman therefore will always vote for him, but it means that subconsciously he's influenced by him. If he knows that the man who gave him a large campaign contribution would like him to vote a certain way, he may pay that man more attention and concern than he does the mass of the people out there. It depends on the congressman and the donor.

Fry: Have you been able to make speeches on campaign financing reform?

Douglas: I have, this year, yes, everyplace. Not in detail; people don't understand it. I mean, you haven't time. You know if you're going to do that, you have to do it the way Gardner does, you talk only about that. (That's John Gardner of Common Cause.) He's making headway with that, yes. But we're not there yet; we're not there yet at all.

Working in the Kennedy Campaign

Fry: When you were working for Kennedy in 1960, what did you do, and where did you make your speeches? I'm sure you made speeches.

Douglas: I campaigned widely for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. Now, the way I would speak, always from '40 on, was to go where I was asked to speak. Sometimes the national committee would schedule me; sometimes it would be a state committee; sometimes it would be the candidate's committee, who would think they could bypass the national committee or state committee and get me directly.

They knew I was talking day and night in campaigns, and therefore they thought maybe she'll crowd it in; if I ask the national committee they'll say no, she doesn't have time, she can't make that date, too. So they'd come to me directly. Or, it might be someone in a given state whom I had known in the government, who'd gone back to their state. They would call me and say, "Helen, did you know that So-and-So is in trouble and we think it would be excellent if we could send him to the Senate. Could you possibly, as you campaign through there, say something for him (or her)?"

Fry: Is there anything that stands out in your mind about the issues or the opposition that you encountered in your speeches for Kennedy in 1960?

Douglas: Yes. Actually [because] I didn't know Kennedy, I didn't have much confidence in him; I didn't have the kind of confidence in him that one would have if they knew how a person thought and how they were going to react. I didn't have that experience.

I did know Lyndon, and where I was most helpful was in the southern states, where I would assure audiences that Lyndon Johnson was not prejudiced, and predicted what he would do on civil rights issues. My record was well known in civil liberties, specifically having to do with minority groups. I was accepted everyplace. I think my contribution was in this area of the campaign, rather than speaking specifically for Kennedy.

Fry: Did you get into the Catholic issue with Kennedy?

Douglas: No, no.

Fry: That was one of those kinds of underlying things--

Douglas: Right.

Fry: --that some people think influenced the outcome of the election-- the patterns of his victory.

Douglas: No, no, I didn't get into that. Mostly it had to do with minorities.

Fry: In both Kennedy and Johnson?

Douglas: Right. No, by then people were more reassured. [With] Johnson it was the all over program, and I knew Johnson. As I remember, in the Johnson campaign, I campaigned only in the eastern states.

Fry: Oh. Not in the South?

Douglas: Yes, South, too. South and eastern, but I didn't go to the far West. I don't think I went to the far West in the Johnson campaign.

Fry: Do your kids ever take part and go with you on your campaign junkets?

Douglas: Mary Helen went with me once in the 1950 campaign. She didn't like campaigning at all; she didn't like all the commotion. She rarely goes now. Our son is so busy with his own work. They all think pretty much the way Melvyn and I do. Mary, I think, is more-- conservative isn't the word, but she's prone to be more searching in her criticism of everything. I welcome her criticism. I think it's very good. I think she's very sensitive, and I welcome any criticism from those who know what they're talking about, and sensitively respond to what's going on. It isn't so much the issues as it is what's happening to us as a people, and so forth. She's very good in this.

Fry: Is there anything else in your campaigning?

Douglas: For instance, to clarify that a little bit: one becomes carried away. One must guard against that, in discussing an issue, you know.

Fry: In a commitment of your support or your objections?

Douglas: Right. Whether it's reclamation or whatever it is.

Fry: Mary Helen, I gather, is a very thoughtful type, who gathers an enormous amount of facts, and perhaps also has access to what's "blowing in the wind" in her generation.

Douglas: Yes.

Writing a Book About Eleanor Roosevelt

Fry: You mentioned a little bit about your writing the Eleanor Roosevelt book, and how you wrote it in two weeks.

Douglas: No, no, four weeks, and the fifth week, you know, to correct it after the galleys came back.

One day I had a telephone call from a Mr. Hill. He was co-publisher with Mr. Wang of a well-known publishing house, Hill and Wang. He asked me if I would write the text for a book they were getting out. The book was composed of pictures that had been edited by Aaron J. Ezickson.

Mr. Ezickson had gone to the Roosevelt Library and he had chosen the pictures for the book. They began with Mrs. Roosevelt's childhood and chronologically carried through to the end of her life. The frontispiece was one that had never been used before, and it has been used many times since. It was a photograph taken by a very distinguished photographer, Philippe Halsman. It was a really beautiful picture of Mrs. Roosevelt, I think by far the best one that was ever taken.

They wanted me to deliver to them the text they were asking for in four weeks. I said, "How can I? It's impossible. I can't do it."

They said, "Mrs. Douglas, the only thing we want is for you to write down some of the stories of your friendship with Mrs. Roosevelt."

I still was hesitant, and I said, "Well, but you know there are people who know Mrs. Roosevelt much better than I knew her. We had a warm, loving friendship, but I'm in no way prepared to write in any sense a book that suggests that I'm writing the story of Mrs. Roosevelt's life."

"No," they said, "we don't want that. We just want your story-- the story of your friendship with Mrs. Roosevelt."

Douglas: I said, "Well, I'll have to see whether those who are around who were so close to her would approve of my doing it. I think there are people who have known her for a great many more years and are closer to her than I was who should do the first book on her. I'll call Nanine Joseph."

Now, Nanine Joseph was the literary agent for Mrs. Roosevelt for many, many years, and a friend of hers. We would always meet once a year at least with Mrs. Roosevelt, Nanine Joseph, and Lorena Hickock on Lorena Hickock's birthday. So they said, "Why don't you do that? Why don't you phone Nanine Joseph, because she thinks it's what should be done--that you ought to write the text for these pictures."

So I called Nanine Joseph and she said, "Yes, Helen, definitely go ahead and write it." So the difficulty in writing the book was not to embroider. I think somewhere else I describe to you how I went about the business of writing the book, and I think it was very unclear. I'll try now to reconstruct that, and you can just cross out what I said before.

I didn't want to in any way build more into our meetings than was there, and I didn't know where to begin. In the first few days I really tried to recall my first meeting with Mrs. Roosevelt and the subsequent meetings. Then, when I would go to bed at night and turn out the light, I would, in thinking about those meetings, pinpoint the situations that came most immediately to mind. So I knew then that they were the most meaningful for me.

Then I would take some notes down in the dark--not decipherable to anybody but me the next day. When my secretary came I would dictate from those notes, what I remembered about each scene, with no order or anything; just put down that particular scene. That's the way I went about it! I worked very long for three or four weeks, and then the first galley proofs came in and they were corrected. I began first, really, with the end of the story, and then retraced my friendship with Mrs. Roosevelt. That didn't seem to work; so when the first galley proof came in, I just cut it up and went back to the beginning.

The only two people who read that script were Lorena Hickock and Marie Rodell. Marie Rodell was my literary agent; she handled the negotiations with Hill and Wang on the book. She is the executor of Rachel Carson's papers and was a very close friend of hers. She's the woman now that wants me to do the story of my life, and in self defense I think I must do it, because everything that comes out is a little bit wrong; you're either wrong or you're right. But anyway, it seems to me that "little bit wrong" really describes it.

Douglas: For instance, the other day I was given the Civil Liberties award for the year from the state of New Jersey--the American Civil Liberties Union in New Jersey. One of the facts that they had was half true: they said I cancelled my contract to sing in concert at the Salzburg Festival in '37 because I was disturbed by what I saw in Austria and Germany at that time, and I returned to the United States. Well, I didn't.

I sang in the Salzburg Festival. It was after that that I sang for the head of the opera company, and auditioned, and was assured that I could return the following year to sing Tosca at the Vienna Opera House. But you see how near the truth is, and how far away it really is? I cancelled that contract.

Anyway, that's how I went about the writing of the book. Really, the writing wasn't so hard. It was dredging up the times we had been together, the times I'd been in the White House as her guest; the times Mrs. Roosevelt had come to California; the one time that she was our guest at the house, and recreating those times as directly and simply as possible. So that's how I came to do the Roosevelt book.

I searched for an impression at the time of a happening, and for any revision of a first impression. If an issue was discussed, what it was, and Mrs. Roosevelt's words about it, and what did I get from it.

I have always thought that we know much more than we realize about everything. In other words, we are seeing, hearing, feeling every hour of the day. If we do not have a hard, fast picture in our minds about people, conditions, blocking what is seen, heard and felt; if we remain open, we constantly register impressions.

I started with that. Depicting Mrs. Roosevelt through the factual recording of what I had seen, heard and felt in her presence. I tried to keep an open mind, reconstructing only the original impressions. Of course, you ask yourself questions about the received impressions--this is inescapable. You know, you ask is this healthy? Is it unhealthy? Is it going in the right direction? Does something seem to be wrong?

In recording the material for the book, I was not supposed to do a definitive work on Mrs. Roosevelt--indeed I could not do that in four weeks--and I was not the one to do it, a fact which I pointed out. I think Joseph Lash has probably done it. I haven't read his two books on Mrs. Roosevelt yet, but Melvyn has and thinks highly of his

Douglas: work. We have Lash's book, of course, two copies of them! The little book I wrote was the story of my friendship with Mrs. Roosevelt and somewhat of Melvyn's. (Not all of it; Melvyn worked with Mrs. Roosevelt in the Office of Civilian Defense before he volunteered for service in the army.)

The Eleanor Roosevelt I Remember was a record of our friendship. It was just what happened between us when together; that's all there is in the book. I first met Mrs. Roosevelt when she was a governor's wife and I was a star in the theater. The Manufacturers Trust Company, one of the banks of which Father was a director, was having a luncheon for some benefit--I don't remember which. Mrs. Roosevelt was to speak. They wanted me to sit at the head table with her and say a few words. I don't think I did more than get up, bow, and sit down again, but since it was one of the banks Father was connected with I went. That was my introduction to Mrs. Roosevelt. I begin there in the book and go through to the end.

Fry: Did you see the pictures before you wrote?

Douglas: Yes, yes, I saw the pictures. But as you can see if you read the text, that didn't in any way give me directions as to the text. There are two pictures in there that had to do with times that Mrs. Roosevelt and I were together. One was when she came to the state and Melvyn and I hired a plane and took her into the fields with Larry Hewes, Laurence Hewes, who was head of the Farm Security in that region.

The Advisory Committee on Agricultural Labor

Douglas: Another time [was] when she was present at the conference in Washington in 1959, of the Advisory Committee on Agricultural Labor. She was on that committee, and I was on that committee, and Dr. Frank Graham and Philip Randolph were co-chairmen. Seabrook, the farmer who also put out those very good frozen foods, was sympathetic with the changes we were trying to bring about for migrant labor.

The hearings that the committee set up in '59 were again to attract the attention of Congress and the public to the fact that the migrants still were being shortchanged, the migrants whom we needed as a part of our whole production of food, as the greatest producers of food in the world. They were being shortchanged.

A committee was set up, as I say, sometime in the middle fifties--maybe earlier than that, but it was after the war that it was

Douglas: set up. There's a picture of that here [in the book], at the dinner that climaxed the end of the conference.

Fry: I'll try to get whatever printed information is available on what this committee did, from the Agriculture Committee itself, but in the meantime--

Douglas: Now the committee is dissolved. In the last few years, it hasn't been in existence. But it was in existence for all that time.

Fry: Could you explain here how the committee came into existence?

Douglas: It came into existence through the efforts of Gardner Jackson and others tremendously concerned, in Washington--part of the old Roosevelt Administration--who realized that people had forgotten about the migrant laborers.

Fry: I thought maybe you and Melvyn had sent out letters?

Douglas: No, no. It all happened in Washington. Then the committee was very carefully chosen. Fay Bennett, whose address I gave you, would know precisely. I don't remember exactly; it's too long ago. But it happened in Washington, with people who had been in the administration--well known in the administration--who thought it was time again that we directed our attention to the plight of the migrant.

Well, I don't have it here, but I have a lot of material in New York, too. Fay Bennett would have material, and she would have material, too, on the sharecroppers. Dr. Frank Graham was also active in the work of the sharecroppers, and he was an officer in that committee. I think Philip Randolph was, too. It was all tied together; it was poverty in the rural areas. In one instance it was sharecroppers; in another instance they were migrant workers. But it was poverty in the rural areas.

Fry: Does this have any effect on legislation at that time that a historian would want to check out?

Douglas: Yes, very definitely.

Fry: What leads can you give us?

Douglas: Well, we were trying to bring to the attention of Congress the fact that these people weren't protected by any of our social security programs or by any other programs, you see. They weren't covered. And the wages--there also was the problem of wetbacks coming in across the border--the Mexicans, you see. It was complicated.

Douglas: The Advisory Committee on Farm Labor was made up of those men and women who had been concerned about, and active in support of migrant laborers before the war and against rural poverty in America--sharecroppers, for instance, in the South especially. There wasn't anybody on there just for name value.

For instance, Seabrook was concerned about migrant labor; he was concerned about rural poverty. Dr. Frank Graham, of course, had been [concerned] as a member of the Senate, and in his own state of North Carolina. Philip Randolph was concerned--although he was the head of the Pullman porters--because there were so many blacks in the South among the sharecroppers who were so poor. Also, after the war, there were many black migrants.

When I first became interested and active on behalf of the migrants, starting with 1938, they were white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxons. Now, it's changed over the years; it's very interesting. Then they were predominantly, for a while, black; then they became Mexican; then, during the war, we allowed--we welcomed--Mexican workers to come into the fields to help produce the extra food. After the war, we shut that off, because they depressed the wages. So then they were brought over the border illegally, called wetbacks. So there was that concern.

There was the fact that the migrants were not covered by many of the protections that had been set up for labor. We tried, in every agricultural bill, to bring to the fore what the conditions were with which Congress must be concerned. Senator Williams of New Jersey was very helpful. He carried the major effort to include the migrants in labor protective legislation in the Congress in the postwar period.

Fry: What about your opposition in these hearings? It's not clear to me what you did.

Douglas: We had testimony and press coverage. The hearings were designed to primarily attract the attention of the Congress to the conditions prevalent for migrant workers everywhere in the states where migrant workers were needed, and for the press to carry that word--to get some publicity out on it. Because of the people who were on that committee, who had been concerned with this problem before the war and had been active, we got a press. And we had people testify.

We had people who had been in the Agriculture Department to testify; authorities were asked to testify. Farmers testified, and the opposition testified! So, it was a hearing; only instead of being a hearing in Congress, which we couldn't get at that time, we set it up as a citizens' concerned group. It was a hearing sponsored by those citizens acquainted with the condition of migrant workers, and who had been acquainted with it and supported changes for thirty years.

Fry: Are testimonies from these hearings available, do you think?

Douglas: Someplace they must be.

Fry: That's something that Fay Bennett would know?

Douglas: Yes. It may be all with the sharecroppers now, at their headquarters.

Fry: What about the Chicanos? What do they call their movement in California?

Douglas: No, that came afterwards.

Fry: There was no continuity there?

Douglas: No.

Fry: I'm so intrigued by the presence on that committee of Mr. Seabrook. Do you know how he got interested in that?

Douglas: Yes, because the committee was always searching out those people who seemed to be enlightened on the subject, and willing to examine the conditions of migrant workers. He himself was very fair in the way he treated migrant workers--conditions under which migrant workers worked for him.

Fry: Was he a member of Associated Farmers, too?

Douglas: Associated Farmers was California. He's in the East.

You looked at me, amazed, when I said the Senator from New Jersey was concerned, but migrant labor is used in New Jersey. Migrant labor is used up and down the East Coast.

Fry: Who else was on that committee? [Advisory Committee on Farm Labor]

Douglas: Well, there was Norman Thomas and Pete Hudgens [Robert W. Hudgens]. Pete Hudgens was in the Department of Agriculture--had very great responsibility. It was Pete Hudgens who helped arrange my last study tour through South America. He was at that time working for the Rockefeller Foundation in the development program in South America.

Fay Bennett, who's just retired from the Sharecroppers Fund, was the executive secretary of the Advisory Committee on Farm Labor during the years that it existed. She wrote suggesting that I think about having another hearing in Washington, such as the one we had in '59, and again in '64. Let me just read this paragraph from Fay's letter. Her whole life has been given over to helping small farmers

Douglas: --helping them to eradicate poverty in the rural areas--and to migrant labor. This is from her letter that came just a few days ago [reads]:

"I'd like to see another public citizen hearing, like the ones we held under the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor in 1959 and 1964. These had a tremendous impact on public thinking and public policy." (And I've described that earlier.) "Such a hearing could bring together a distinguished panel of hearing officers." (That will be the people sitting on the panel who are hearing the testimony, do you see?)

"But can we find people to match Norman Thomas, Frank Graham, Eleanor Roosevelt, Pete Hudgens, and people like yourself and some others? Can we find them to hear witnesses among the small farmers around the country who are organizing themselves into cooperatives and trying to reclaim the land and produce good food?" (Now, that's what's happening now in the South.)

"There's very little public understanding of what is happening to the small farmer today, except that he is being pushed out. Most folks assume he is the wave of the past and obsolete for the modern age. Of course, these small farmers will go down the drain if they continue with the old row crops--cotton, tobacco, corn." (Because they deplete the land, you see.)

"But they are economic and efficient as food producers," (she's talking about the little farmers) "if they can get some of the capitalization, technical assistance, and marketing advice, which agribusiness has easy access to. And the small, diversified farmer could learn to take care of his soil, through recycling and composting, producing better quality food without polluting the soil, water, and air."

Then Fay Bennett went on to say [reading]:

"The government's role would be to subsidize these operations, to encourage real production and to buy up whatever could not be sold on the open market because of marketing problems which would need time to work out. Thus, a stockpile would be built up. Of course, there are other aspects of the problem, such as using less grain to feed cattle, thus releasing more grain for feeding hungry people."

Douglas: This goes directly, Chita, to the problem today of starvation facing tens of millions of people in Asia and Africa. It will grow around the world because, as you know, the fertilizers that they thought would bring about the green revolution--

Fry: Now use too much energy in their production?

Douglas: Well, the point is that they don't have the oil. The oil's too expensive, so they can't make the fertilizer which they used to increase their crops. The Rockefellers, as a matter of fact, helped in the development of that fertilizer. So the production of food is going to be, if not one of the major problems before us, the major problem.

Fry: It looks like it already is.

Douglas: Yes. And we, as the largest producers of food in the world, have to examine what we're doing and how we can improve what we're doing. And we have, also, to be concerned with the fact that we have allowed agribusiness to develop in a way that has undermined family-owned farms throughout the country. We have changed the whole quality of rural life. We have these rootless people now, who are still needed to work in the fields. This is basically what was behind my concern for the preservation of the Reclamation Act and the preservation of the 160-acre limitation that Paul Taylor was interested in, and we've given a good part of our lives to.

Fry: Were you in at all on the 1964 hearings?

Douglas: I don't remember. I attended two hearings and there was a third one. I may have been somewhere else. I don't remember that particular hearing. I was there for the '59 but I'm not sure that I was there for the third. Fay would remember. I don't think I was there.

Friendship With Helen Fuller

Fry: You were a good friend of Helen Fuller of the New Republic. Wasn't she the editor-in-chief of the New Republic?

Douglas: Yes, she was my best friend, in those last years of her life. I became acquainted with Helen, I guess, before I went to Congress. I probably met her through Michael Straight, who was owner and editor of the New Republic. She was managing editor.

Douglas: We were very close. We saw each other very often when I was in Congress, and I used to go, when I was able to now and then, for weekends to Virginia where she stayed on the Charles Marsh estate, Jasmine Hill. He was the man that owned so many newspapers throughout the South. and after he died his estate was set up in the form of a foundation. Helen was on the foundation board.

After Helen left the New Republic, when the New Republic was sold--Michael sold it--she went to live after a few years permanently in Virginia, in her little house. I went to see her right up to the time of her death. I was very fond of her. I thought she was a brilliant woman. Do you know her book on Kennedy written right after the election?

Fry: No.

Douglas: I think I have it upstairs; I have it in here. I'll show it to you.

Fry: Right after the 1960 election?

Douglas: Right. Well, that's about all, except that I enjoyed her friendship. I suppose Helen was as widely connected around the country with Democrats, and some Republicans as well, as anybody in that period, because of her standing in the New Republic. And she helped raise money for candidates and for people running for the first time. She was a political organizer.

Fry: Does she have an autobiography or anything like that?

Douglas: No, she doesn't. There should be a biography written about her. She was a very close friend of Paul Douglas. When she came up from the South first, she was in Justice Black's office. She was a lawyer herself.

Fry: Was she a law clerk?

Douglas: She was a law clerk to Black. She was a friend of Bill Douglas--all those people in the New Deal that were "names" were close friends. Her friends made up a long, long list. She was a dear. She had a lovely sense of humor. I never knew anyone quite like her. I mean by that that it was not only that she was interested in politics. She was widely read in literature, very interested in everything that was being written. She loved the country, she loved the flowers, she loved collecting antiques. I'm just "swamping" at interests that she had.

She was tremendously gifted in her relationship with children --with young people--tremendously gifted. She was instrumental, for instance, in the town of Washington, Virginia, in obtaining the

Douglas: support of a foundation for buying that building and setting up a library there. Then she went on from that and was creative in the way it was used to help children come into the library. So she conceived of the idea of having volunteer readers read from books to the children; so the children formed the habit of coming into the library. They'd feel at home in the library, and it was very, very successful. She'd arrange for Christmas parties for the children. Now, when I say the children, I'm talking about everybody in the community--white, black, poor, middle class, and so forth. I'm talking about children; there were no demarcations as to what children would be invited.

When she went to live permanently in Virginia, she was very creative in everything that she did, and her interests were very wide; her understanding of what made for a healthy community was sound. So she had humor, she had lightness, she had other interests. She liked painting. When I went to see her in Virginia she always had my paints out, and she said, "All right, now paint! And everything you paint belongs to me! Remember that. You can't have anything that you paint. You can't take a single thing away with you."

Then, when we had an auction after her death, I was one of the executors, Mrs. Marsh was one of the executors, and the commonwealth attorney there, George Davis, was an executor. The only instruction she gave was to pay off her debts. She didn't have much money at all, but she had some art possessions and some artifacts that were very valuable.

Fry: Antiques, I guess.

Douglas: Yes. So we had an auction, and I tried to salvage my paintings again. George Davis said, "You can't take those, Helen. They belong to the estate; they're here."

I said, "But those are my paintings. They're not going to sell my paintings; they're not worth anything!"

[He said] "That is for us to decide--what they're worth. And you're not going to take a painting out of here."

I said, "All right. But I think it will be humiliating to sit up there on the platform, head this auction, and have my own paintings come out!"

India Edwards bought a painting; Mary Keyserling bought a painting, and the George Davieses. All the people I knew who were there wanted a painting of mine. There were any number of them, and they all went to my friends.

Fry: Do you in turn have some of Helen Fuller's paintings?

Douglas: She didn't paint.

Fry: She didn't!

Douglas: No, she didn't paint. She just loved paintings.

Fry: I thought I'd seen a snapshot of her painting at her estate.

Douglas: No, no. She didn't paint.

Fry: How about music?

Douglas: She loved music, and she played records, but she wasn't herself musical. But she was a pretty good critic of music and enjoyed good music. No, her forte was literature, literature and politics. But she had these interests that fed her and kept her alive and vibrant.

Fry: The theme of our interview this time around seems to be women. Did she have any special views on women's equality?

Douglas: She was an only child. She was one of those only children we talked about earlier. She was an only child whose family spoiled her; anything she wanted, she had. She was successful in her school; she was successful when she came into Washington. She was independent from the beginning. So again, this was a case of someone who didn't have to fight to be liberated; she was already liberated. She never was conscious that she wasn't liberated, because she was brought up in a house where she was free from the very beginning, in every sense. She would be for women; she was for women, yes, definitely. I mean, the whole movement she supported and thought it was sound. She might not agree with everything any more than I do, but the idea of the movement of women and women trying to bring about a more equal voice in policy making, and in fairness under the law, were the changes that had to take place to make that possible.

Fry: How did you and she come into each other's ken?

Douglas: I had met her, and she was there, and she knew all the people I knew in Washington. It was a normal kind of growing acquaintance that then became a friendship, very normal. All the people I knew, she knew; and we were interested in the same campaigns, the same issues in the Congress. We rarely disagreed on anything.

Fry: Did you ever do anything for the New Republic?

Douglas: No, I don't think I ever wrote anything for the New Republic.

Fry: I assume that Helen Fuller was able to at least quote you on things like this, when something--

Douglas: Yes, they supported me.

Fry: I can see also how it would be an advantage to her to be able to call you and get congressional--

Douglas: She didn't have to. Well, she did once in awhile ask me things. But she didn't have to. She had so many irons in the fire that she didn't have to go to any one person.

Fry: But you would be one that she would call?

Douglas: Yes, yes. But it was only if you directly were concerned with a piece of legislation.

Fry: I'm thinking especially of atomic energy control.

Douglas: That, yes. And she listened to me and what I had to say on the arms race, because I was ahead of a lot of folks on that. I talked about it and talked about it, the way I talked about water in California. A lot of people got sick of hearing about water, but I still talked about it.

I would raise the arms race in connection with other issues and warn as to what would happen unless we went about the problem of achieving security through disarmament rather than arming. It had to be, of course, through achieving disarmament for everybody; we weren't going to disarm in the face of the armaments other nations would possess--the Soviet Union or anybody else.

Painting for Pleasure

Fry: In your own painting, how did you get started on that?

Douglas: I was in Congress, and I visited my sister on Long Island. She had a house on the water there. It was Sunday, and I was to return to Washington that night. Early in the morning, I was sitting in the living room going over papers. I'd been there for a number of hours when my nephew, Herbert Walker, came in. He is a sculptor and a painter. He said, "Oh, Helen, for goodness sakes, aren't you ever free of those papers?"

Douglas: I said, "No, I'm not. I have more work to do."

He said, "Well now, put it down just for a minute—just for a minute—and come with me." So he took the papers out of my hand and he led me back into one of the bedrooms. There was an easel set up, where he had been working, and there was a fresh canvas on the easel and a great tempting bowl of brushes beside it, and paints! He took a brush and handed it to me and said, "Paint!"

I said, "You must be crazy. I can't paint."

[He said] "Everybody can paint. Paint."

So I began; I remember, I worked on it four hours that first stint. I started, and I don't know what made me think of ducks; I've still got that painting in New York. Elizabeth Wickenden and Tex Goldschmidt wanted very much to have that painting. There are two ducks in it. One is a duck flying and the other a duck on the ground looking at the duck flying. She said, "Those are the two you's, Helen. You're taking off, and the other part of you is looking up and saying, 'Where are you going? Where are you going?'"

In any case, that was the beginning. Then, little by little, by little, I began to paint. Now, this last summer there's been so much going on in the country and there have been so many demands on my time that I lifted a brush to paint once or twice, but I have not painted.

You have to have some peace and quiet to work on music, or to paint. There were the hearings to listen to, there was all the reading one had to get through—hours and hours of reading if one wanted to keep up with what was going on. So there's been very little painting. But, for instance, if I look at a scene that fascinates me, it begins to take shape in my mind, and I think, "I have to get that on canvas; I have to get that on canvas."

Fry: Where did you paint, mostly? Up here?

Douglas: Here, and in Virginia; some in New York City; some in Mexico—That one up in the room where you're staying now is my memory of a particular scene on the road from Cuernavaca to Mexico City, when you go up over the mountains?

I painted in Cuernavaca. I painted in Colombia, when I visited Mary Helen, our daughter. She would be working all day, and I was at the hotel. I'd either be preparing my program of Emily Dickinson to give to the bilingual school, and then later to a gathering of Colombian poets; and in addition to the time I put in on that, I also painted. I gave those paintings to the girls

Douglas: coming in to make up the rooms. They were in love with the paintings, and so I gave them to them! I said, "Well, that's easy; I'll give them to you." I think I did three paintings and gave them all away to people in the house.

And in Virginia [it was] the same way. There were the workers on this big place of the Marshes, and they had no paintings, and also some of the black help, they had no paintings in their homes; or, if they did, they were copies of things.

They were so taken with the colors that I used. You know, they were cheery, cheery colors! I guess I see the world really as a cheery place, despite everything. So I would give to them; they have my paintings. And then they'd say, "Do you know that I have your painting, and it's so cheery?" Then there'd be other people—for instance, the head woman secretary to my brother came up and saw them. She said, "Oh, I would love to have one of your paintings." I said, "Nothing could be simpler. Which one do you want? You may have it."

So they're scattered far and wide, besides the few that were sold—which always intrigues me. Now, how did they come to be sold? At that auction they were sold, of course. But who knows whether they wanted the paintings of [whether] they just wanted to contribute to Helen's fund. All that money, by the way, went to the library that she had supported.

But there was an antique dealer up here that I knew for years. He's no longer here. He had come to dinner here one night and seen some of the paintings. He said, "Helen, why don't you give me some of your paintings and I'll put them in my shop. Somebody may come in and buy them."

I said, "Oh no, Paul, that's not going to happen."

He said, "Just let me have them. What do you lose? I can look at them during the winter and you can have them in the spring when you come back."

So, I gave him I think just one painting, which was rather an eerie painting. When I came up in the spring, after I'd been here awhile I stopped in at his home--his shop--to see him. He said, "I have something for you." I had a long dress on, a wool skirt. He said, "Now, take that purse off your lap, I want to throw something in it." Then he proceeded to throw \$150 or \$175--I've forgotten now--into my lap. I said, "What's that for?"

He said, "For your painting."

Douglas: Then, shortly after that, in New York, a man called me one day. He said, "Mrs. Douglas?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "I went through New England in early spring and I stopped in to Paul Jenkins's shop and saw a painting there that interested me. It was not signed, but I was told that it was your painting. Is it?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Thank you, that's what I wanted to know. Now, one thing more I want to know. What is it about? Because my wife and I don't agree." Then he said, "Now, one other question: I want to know what you were thinking of when you painted the picture."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "My wife and I have had a heated discussion about it. I said that it had to do something with the end of the world, or the beginning of the world."

I said, "Well, you're right."

Fry: Which one was it?

Douglas: It was the end of the world--the end of the world, with all the colors coming, you see, and then these figures, these bird figures that were swooping down. They were the bombs--they were the missiles; both of them coming down, but nothing was that much defined. But obviously, you could see that it was the earth. And it looked so beautiful with all these colors. I'm not talking about my painting being beautiful, but I'm talking about the colors being so beautiful. Well, anyway, he said, "It has a place of honor over our mantel, and I just thought I had to have it." So that's the end of my painting story.

Fry: If I had to describe to somebody your paintings, I would describe first of all the colors in them, because that's the thing that strikes you first when you see them. And the way you have colors juxtaposed.

Douglas: Yes. Well, that's what attracts me to paint, is putting those colors on the canvas.

Trip to the USSR With the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1964

Fry: Now, I'd like to move on to Russia, where you went in 1964, on a Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Delegation. The meetings there, themselves, according to these notes, took place in April. Maybe we could start by backing up to discuss what you did with WILPF earlier and how you first became interested in WILPF.

Douglas: Well, I first became acquainted with the league women when I was in the Congress, right after the war. I was chairman of a subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs Committee that had the responsibility of holding hearings on the United Nations and the specialized agencies of the United Nations.

Women came from all over the country to testify in support of the United Nations at that time, and the specialized agencies. Women came from the league, and so I became acquainted with some of them. It was Dr. Stewart, a woman minister, who was the league representative on the Hill. She came very often into my office, not only in support of the league, but in support of other measures that were before the Congress that the league was interested in. I knew about Jane Addams, of course, and her work in World War I, and the women with her, and the part she played in so many ways in community programs, and her efforts for peace.

So I came to be very close to these women after the war. After we dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and the war was ended, I was talking immediately about world cooperation and our need to give strong support to the United Nations, and [how] we must avoid having an arms race because of the nature of the new weapons, and so forth.

I joined the International League for Peace and Freedom after I left the Congress, and went to some of their meetings in Philadelphia. You know that the league has chapters all over the free world; it has no chapters in Communist countries because they are not free to criticize their governments. But their effort is to reach people in totalitarian countries. They try to build bridges between ourselves and people living under other forms of government in the hope that there can be greater understanding throughout the whole world of conditions that will be needed if we are to achieve a peaceful, disarmed world.

There had been a conference sponsored by the league and by Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Eugene Meyer--the Eugene Meyerses were the owners of the Washington Post--and Marian Anderson. They sponsored

Douglas: the conference between Russian women and American. It was held at Bryn Mawr College two years before the second meeting in Moscow. The league and those connected with the first conference were pleased with the conference. But apparently the Russian delegation wasn't pleased.

Their women had not been as well informed as our women were; nor were they at liberty to discuss issues as freely as our women were. They must have chafed under this when they went home--the difference in the way our women responded to questions and the way their women responded to questions was obvious to them.

It took two years to arrange a return visit, and it had been understood from the beginning that there would be a return visit. So in order that the agreement finally be finalized, they had to agree to our seeing certain parts of the Soviet Union aside from Moscow, where the conference was to be held. For instance, the league wanted to be shown around in Leningrad; they wanted to see Tashkent and Samarkand. And they wanted to see as many things in the community in Leningrad and Tashkent and Samarkand as possible, so they could get a feeling, really, of the country.

We were given the red carpet treatment. This time, the conference had been organized in such a way that they had picked some of their top women to be on the delegation. There was no question about their being less gifted or less prepared to discuss issues than we were. They were enormously gifted, and they were at the head--they were professors in the universities, or they were scientists, or they were in the government.

We were very much impressed with their caliber. I think in many ways they were, on the whole, a little better equipped than our women were. We had some very, very extraordinary women in our delegation, but I wouldn't say every one matched up to what their women were in terms of their ability and their background, and their disciplines, and where they were in their disciplines.

Fry: They had learned from Bryn Mawr!

Douglas: Well, not only that. They'd picked their top women this time. So Moscow and things were arranged. For instance, one of the two men who went to the North Pole--we went into his family's home in Moscow, which was unusual. In Leningrad we went into the home of the mayor of Leningrad, a woman, and she gave a dinner. In both places there were dinners given, by the women--the women prepared it. Then we were taken throughout the community in Leningrad. We were taken to one of the marriage houses, an old, large mansion. We saw the young couples who came to be married. The wedding took place in what must have been the ballroom of the mansion, one couple at a time.

Fry: Was that where you took the gift?

Douglas: Yes. They had a room that had been made into a gift shop. There was one couple we met, so I went in and picked out a gift for the couple, and they were very pleased. They were very honored to think that Americans were there to watch the wedding ceremony. At one end of the long ballroom there was a table. In back of it the mayor, or some official in the town, married them. It was not a religious wedding.

The couples were separated; the boys and girls were not together before the marriage. She came in one door and he came in another, so there was some semblance of what a church wedding had been prior to the Communist government. They came in and met before the table and the ceremony took place. Then they went out and there was a room [with a table] spread with a lace tablecloth, and there were a few little cakes and cookies and some wine. They insisted that I have some wine with them and some cakes and cookies. There was a line of more young men and women waiting to be married outside.

I had become separated from our group earlier that particular day because I had one of my horrible back attacks. They took me to the hospital, and what struck me at the hospital was that I didn't see any male doctors. They may have been there, but I didn't see them. There were only female doctors. They worked on my back; they didn't really help me very much. So I was a little behind our delegation. After we were at this palace where the weddings were taking place, the two women were discussing something. I asked, "What are you discussing?"

They said, "You know, people have to have moments like these weddings in their life that are special--if you're going to get married, or if there's a funeral or a baptism--they have to have something that sets it apart as a special day. That's why we brought these weddings into these homes, where there was some beauty in the home, and they feel that there's something special." Which I thought was interesting.

It struck me as very noteworthy, interesting, that the government had repaired Leningrad, after the bombing of Leningrad. Leningrad is made up in part of enormous buildings. You know, it's the Venice of the north. It's a beautiful city and they are proud of it.

Fry: It was already repaired by the time you visited it?

Douglas: It was repaired! They didn't tear down the bombed palaces and build some monstrous structure there; they rebuilt the palaces and museums; the beauty of that city was restored. I thought,

Douglas: "Well, that shows that there's respect for the past," which they were denigrating and denying. Now, there were many faults, goodness knows, but one can't throw the past away, either. I took the rebuilding as a healthy sign.

I was struck by the fact that in Tashkent and Samarkand the Russian people on the tour who came with us from Moscow seemed to take special pains to be very nice to the local people, who are a different people. They are Asians, you know, having a totally different culture. They didn't just go in. I didn't feel that they were ordering them around or "coming down" from Moscow, you know. There was quite a little evidence of praising them, and going along with them: "We've come to see you. Will you please tell our guests something of your history. We know that you can tell it better than we can." In other words, they deferred to the leaders in Tashkent and Samarkand during our visit. I thought that rather revealing.

Then they took us to what they considered to be a very modern farm. Well, I know something about farming, and I thought it was far from modern. It was the most unmodern farm I ever saw in my life. I thought, "Good God, no wonder they have trouble with their food!"

Fry: It was mechanized by this time, I suppose?

Douglas: The farm was not mechanized. If it was mechanized, I saw no evidence of it. And it was not like any farm that you would think was a really productive project. They gave us a meal that was sumptuous, however, all farm foods. I couldn't believe it came off that land.

Also, we went into the farming area on the other side of Lenin-grad, and the whole area of farms didn't look to me as if they were operating in a way that would produce anywhere near what the land could have produced, nor did they look up-to-date at all. However, I know from Russians who came from Russia and fled from the revolution, who've told me of the fields of grain that they had in those days and the enormous supply of food.

And that was one of their complaints: "Forget that the new government is Communist, but just how could that government have destroyed the production of food as they did? Because we had food." Well, that's debatable, too, because there were people, too, that were hungry. I don't know. In any case, the farms that they showed us--and they showed us those farms because they were proud of them--were not anything to be proud of, in our terms, at all.

I think what I had to say was put into those papers that will be a part of the record. At that time Khrushchev was still in power. There was a willingness, it seemed to me in evidence, to be friendly and to be accepted by us than at any time perhaps before or afterwards.

Fry: You were there right at that nice period, before Krushchev went out of power.

Douglas: Right at that time. And there had been some kind of misunderstanding between the American Embassy and the Foreign Office in Moscow. When I came, I explained to some of the top Russian women in the conference, "You know, I don't go to any country unless I report to the American ambassador." Of course, that's not true at all, but I just thought I'd feel better if I went to see the American ambassador and let him know I was there and what was going on. They knew in the United States that I was there, because I had been briefed by the Disarmament Agency on what I could say about disarmament--what was possible.

Fry: Really? Did you have to change your speech in any way?

Douglas: No, no. I was briefed in Washington on some facts that I needed.

Our schedule was so tight I asked, "When can time be arranged? Because I would like to pay a call on the embassy, so they'll know I'm here."

They said, "That's splendid, and we'll arrange it for you. And would you do a favor for us? There's been some kind of misunderstanding." (Nothing to do with our conference; something that happened before.) They said, "It's so stupid on both of our parts, and it all can be bridged over if you would urge the ambassador, please. He will be invited to a big dinner the last night that you are here. We do so want him to come, and would you ask him to come?"

So I repeated, verbatim, to the ambassador exactly what they'd said, and he came to the dinner.

As I said in the paper (to just finish with the conference), the Russian women always spoke in Russian, and we always spoke in English. Then the translators would translate what the Russian women said into English. I suppose it was a sense of pride, that they spoke only Russian at the conference table. It was translated into English for us. There were a lot of interesting conversations and their conversations were very informal--very relaxed. Most of the Russian delegation spoke English fluently.

We were housed in the hotel that is kept for diplomats, a very luxurious hotel, marvelously appointed. That was in Moscow; and in Leningrad we stayed at a regular hotel where people could come in to stay. It was a nice hotel, but it didn't begin to have the appointments that the hotel did in Moscow.

Douglas: The food was much better in Leningrad, strangely enough. I thought the food was very skimpy in Moscow, but not in Leningrad. And the food in Tashkent and Samarkand was very good.

Fry: So it was just in Moscow that the food was not so good?

Douglas: Well, it seemed to me that it wasn't; I think they were having a rather hard time in Moscow. I had a great sense of compassion for the Russian people when I was there--a tremendous sense of compassion. And other times I felt as though I was absolutely suffocating if I didn't get out of the place; I wouldn't be able to breathe at all--it was a sense of what they have gone through, and what they are still going through. I don't know if this was just an emotional reaction; there certainly was no evidence whatsoever while we were there to duress in any way. We were not exposed to that. It doesn't mean it wasn't there. Let's say that we were not exposed to it.

Fry: To the Russian people being under duress?

Douglas: Right. But, an interesting conversation happened, also on the way to the airport. [There was] a young woman whose husband was in the government, in the foreign service, as I remember. The Lenin awards were just coming up, and just that morning either her husband had won the Lenin award, or she wanted him to win. In any case, she was so excited about it.

I, with Dorothy Hutchinson, the head of the American delegation, had written with the Russian women a final statement on the conference the last night in Moscow. So after we finished that, the dinner was over at the hotel. One of the Russian women--the woman whose husband was in the government--went with me to eat in the dining room. Dorothy Hutchinson, who has to wear braces (she's an extraordinary woman) went immediately to her room and had something sent to her room to eat.

I went into the dining room with this young woman, and she began to talk only about the Lenin award. I said, "Why is the Lenin award so sought after? Why is that so desirable?" She said, "Why? Because we'll have a better apartment; we'll have a better car. Well, it's just better all the way around." I pumped her some more about what she was going to have as a result of the Lenin award.

The next morning--I think he'd gotten it; I think that was it, as I remember--she was full of this. They took us to the airport in a big bus, and she was sitting in front of me. She said, "You know, he got the Lenin award." I said, "Yes." She said, "Do you know what else is going to happen?" I said, "What?" By this time she was just talking freely. The others talked very seriously. She

Douglas: was a little more flighty, or more down to earth, maybe, as to what was going to happen for her. She said, "Well, you know, last year and other years when we would go on our vacation, we are told when we have to get up, when we have to go to bed, when we have to eat, how much exercise we have to take, when we take the exercise; we're told where we have to go, with a certain group to the same place. This year we go to the same place, but we're not going to be told what to do! We can get up when we want, we can exercise as we want or not at all. Isn't that wonderful?"

I said, "Yes. You'll be so free that you won't know what to do with yourself, will you?" She said, "Oh, yes, we'll know what to do with ourselves." I thought that was revealing. Imagine, to be sent on your vacation and then be told exactly what you are to do, as if you were in school.

Well, those are little parts of the whole story. I was struck by the fact that on the street of the wedding palace there were two or three other incidents, people talked to us. The warmth of their expressions showed a trust of United States citizens that I found encouraging.

Then there was a special show at one of the museums. Everyone on our delegation didn't see it, but the head woman from the foreign service said she'd like me to see it. Because every day, instead of eating lunch I went to some museum, and they arranged for me to go. There was no time to go otherwise; there was always a reception at the end of the day. I wanted to go to the museums, and I wanted to see who went to the museums. I was heartened to see that children came in busloads; their teachers were with them--the same kind of attendance that would occur in our museums. I thought that was a healthy sign.

She asked me if I would be interested in going to an exhibit put on by the United States, and I said that indeed I would. So we went, and the line was way out in the street. It was absolutely packed, jammed. We never could have gotten in for hours and hours and hours, but that she went around to the head man and said that we were there and would he bring us in. Otherwise we would still have been there a week later; we couldn't have gotten into the place.

We went in, and it was an exhibit that had to do with packaging of foods of every kind. Her disgust was shown, then, very plainly. She said, "I don't think it's fair for your country to show us this packaging. We are concerned with producing food to feed our people, and to lead them to believe that the packaging is 'it'--and naturally they're fascinated by it. We can't begin to package anything this way." But there they went, piling through, just to see the packaging! It was all done the modern way, you know, with turntables, in glass revolving circles.

Fry: Was it things like jars, and boxes, and plastic bags?

Douglas: Right. And some other things. I've forgotten what they were, but I remember it was the packaging that struck me the most forcibly, and what seemed to disturb her the most.

At the end of the conference, as I said, there was this conversation with the woman who was closest, I guess, to Khrushchev's wife of anybody there. She was obviously in the foreign service. She said she had been for years in the Russian embassy in the United States. They were disturbed, as you can see from my papers, by the fact that the pressures on Khrushchev indicated that he would be toppled unless he had some success with Europe and the United States.

The overall concern in the Soviet Union when we were there was concern over the Chinese. There was real anxiety as to what the Chinese were up to, and whether or not it was going to mean another war. They really suffered so in World War II that the thought of war was always with them. And that's what I reported back to the States--that their concern was over the Chinese and they were hoping that they could have some demonstrable success in bettering relations with the West and the United States.

I always believed, you know, that it was within Lyndon's power to achieve some agreement with Khrushchev on disarmament. Actually Lyndon did, under his administration, try. There were U.S. proposals for disarmament that the Russians didn't pick up. But I always felt that Lyndon should have persisted anyway, to improve conditions with the Russians; they could have gone back and back, and they could have succeeded, perhaps, and also the Chinese would have come along. I think the Chinese would have come along at that time, too.

Fry: Before they got their own bomb?

Douglas: Yes.

Fry: Do you want to tell about the message you sent to Lyndon?

Douglas: Yes. Well, this young woman that I'm telling you about came just before I left that day and sent this message. They knew that I knew Lyndon and was a friend, and had been received at the White House; so this wasn't just talking to anybody. She probably wouldn't have said this to anyone else in the delegation. This was a message she hoped I'd get through to the president. I tried to get it through to him, so that he at least would have it in front of him.

The essence of the message was, "Khrushchev's in trouble; he needs to come West. He wants to make agreements with the West that will help him make the kind of concessions in disarmament that we both could agree to." And the military was pressuring him.

Fry: The woman who told you this wasn't just any woman, either?

Douglas: No, no. She was in the foreign service.

Fry: So do you think this message she gave you came pretty much right from Khrushchev?

Douglas: I think it came right from his wife. Now, whether it came from Khrushchev or not, I don't know. But it certainly came from his wife. I would think that it was one of those feelers that they send out, you know?

Fry: Do you think you got the letter to President Lyndon Johnson?

Douglas: That I don't know, because I wasn't back in the States. I sent it through certain channels that I was sure would get it there. The Disarmament Agency got it and sent me word that it was the best report that came in from any other person, as to what was happening in the Soviet Union at that time--the fear of China and that Khrushchev was in trouble. He needed to make some agreements with the West; he wanted better relations, better understanding.

In other words, there was the opportunity, because so much depends on what the preoccupation of a country is at a given moment, as to whether or not they will agree to any cutback in arms.

Fry: The other question that I wanted to ask you is whether you were aware of any surveillance while you were there? Did you feel that you were being watched?

Douglas: No. But, there was one interesting thing. I flirted with the idea of not going directly back to London from Moscow. We had gone to Moscow, Leningrad, Tashkent, Samarkand, and then back to Moscow where the final dinner was given. We were there for a day and a half and we could do what we wanted in the city. We broke up into separate groups, or went separately, and there would be certain people from the foreign office who would take us around, depending on what you wanted to see.

I knew the Finnish ambassador to the United Nations. He was married to an English girl who had been at Barnard with me; we'd been friends all these years. Letters had been sent to me saying, "If you're going to the Soviet Union, for heaven's sake, stop in Finland and see George." (Peggy di Grippenbergs was her name--his name was di Grippenbergs.) So I put a phone call through to him and got him on the phone. He said, "Yes, by all means, do come."

Douglas: I was talking to this same young woman [who gave me the message about Khrushchev]--Tamara Memodeva--and she said, "Don't you think you'd better go back with the delegation? Won't it be very awkward for you? You've had this bad back and all." I got the idea as she talked that it would have been embarrassing for them if I went from the Soviet Union to Finland.

Fry: What did you do then?

Douglas: I didn't go. It wasn't that important to me. I didn't want to upset the good relations that we had had, and start a lot of suspicions that were unwarranted. I loved Peggy, but it wasn't that important. I just thought it would be interesting to go see Finland while he was there, and he just happened to be home at that time. Well, I went to Finland anyway, later, because our daughter was there in the craft school in the upper part of Finland.

The tension is still there between Finland and the Soviet Union. In fact, the Finns don't trust anybody. They don't trust the Swedes, they don't trust anybody who occupied their country. The poor Finns, they've always gotten it.

Fry: What's the story about how your back got bad?

Douglas: I carried a heavy bag with my papers in it.

Fry: Because you didn't want to leave them in your hotel room?

Douglas: That's right, exactly. And it pulled my neck out of shape. In London, I had to be given an anesthetic. A very great woman doctor there cracked my back. It was all out of place and she couldn't possibly get it back in place if I was conscious. I was all right after I stayed in bed and slept for two days. But I was in just absolutely agonizing pain when I left Russia. That, too, had argued against my going to Finland.

But that was the only suggestion [of surveillance]. For instance we went to the opera one night, and on the way back there were buses to take us, and we said, "No, we don't want to do that; we're going to take the [public] bus back." And they agreed. We brought with us a Russian woman from the United States, who had been a refugee. Her husband taught at Harvard. They were polite to her--I don't think they liked her very well. There was something said once, "We don't think much of these people that leave our country and don't stay here to work, that go off someplace else. They don't stay through the hard times."

Fry: You felt that you were given freedom of movement?

Douglas: No, I can't rightly say that, because it wasn't as if you had spare hours in which you would have freedom of movement. We arrived, and the night we arrived we went to the hotel, where there was a conference--a gathering--to acquaint the delegations with each other. The next morning we got up early and the conference began, went all day; there was something arranged for luncheon; then there was something at the end of the day; then there was supper; and I've forgotten whether we went to the concert that night or we went to bed. There was something all the time.

It was only at the end where we were free, where there was free time to go around the city. When we went to Leningrad something was arranged all the time. So it wasn't as if we were free in that sense, "Now you can go out on the city." There was no time to go out on the city. In fact, the people in our delegation didn't speak Russian: what would they have done out around the city, unless they were with someone to guide them?

So I can't say that we went to the Soviet Union and we were free to go anyplace.

Fry: How did you use this when you came back? Did you incorporate it in your lectures that you were giving afterwards?

Douglas: I didn't use it very much. Oh, yes, I talked a little about the Soviet Union and my impressions there. I didn't discuss the message that was being sent through me to the president. I really went to that conference because I had so often wanted to see Russia. I had read so much about it, and knew the literature, and had followed it in Congress--before Congress and after Congress.

I'd had firsthand stories of the Revolution from Madame Cehanovska, who had felt the impact of it immediately. Her husband was the president of the Imperial Bank of Russia. They'd heard disturbances in the streets, but they didn't realize they were serious. It was the revolution starting.

One day she was being served luncheon and the maid serving her backed up to the sideboard and said, "Madame, I will not be working for you anymore." She said, "Oh? When will you be leaving?" The girl looked at her, cold-eyed, and said, "I'll not be leaving; you will be leaving tomorrow, Madame."

So I got that side from a number of people--a number of artists that have come out. Then we had so much of it in the Congress, so many reports, and all the books and everything. I was very eager to go, and very eager to see what it was like.

Home in Vermont

Childhood Summers at Lake Morey, Vermont

Fry: Yesterday we took a walk around the compound here, and went down to the lake and saw the creek, and you showed me the place where you can walk up to get into a wilderness area, too. Why don't you tell us what you and your brothers and sisters did in your summers here. Did you take many walks like that?

Douglas: Oh, yes. Walking was part of the summer, an important part. But let me start from the beginning and try to give you a list of what we did. Otherwise I'll forget some of it.

When we would arrive at the lake--we drove up from New York City--Mother would give us a command (Mother never commanded; I'm hunting for the word that would apply to Mother), a direction, she would say, "Girls, listen. The minute you get out of this car I want you to immediately get the ladders and the brooms, and take the cobwebs off the porch."

Our house is surrounded by a porch which they have in New England--you see them in the hotels. It goes almost all around the house--certainly three and a half sides of the house have this big wide covered porch. I don't know why there were always so many cobwebs around, when we came, on the ceiling. In any case, Lilli and I had to get rid of those cobwebs. Mother couldn't bear to look at them for one second. So that was a chore that we had to do, immediately when we arrived.

What do I remember? Every day we had to prepare the lamps for that evening, because there was no electricity and no telephone. That was Lillian's and my chore. And there must have been things around the house, but I don't remember them very vividly. I remember those two things very vividly, as though it were yesterday.

Fry: Did you have a maid?

Douglas: We always had one or two. But there were five of us children, you know. There were three big meals a day, there was the laundry; and there was cleaning of the house; and there were guests who came, not only to visit Father (because Father came up a few times in the

Douglas: summer, but he didn't stay. He was working, so he'd come up and visit us, but he wouldn't stay more than the weekend and then he'd go away). But Mother had guests, and Lillian and I had guests, and the boys had guests. So the house was filled with people, and two in help were hard put just to keep the underpinnings going. So all the kind of pickup work we had to do. For instance, it was a felony in our family to leave a towel lying on the bathroom floor; it just wasn't done. You didn't make unnecessary work for someone to go around picking up after you.

Very many of the summers Mother would bring a teacher here. One or two summers there was a woman who was a very well-known music teacher, who also taught us in the winter, who came up. She was Mother's guest and she taught us a number of hours in the morning. Lessons were always in the morning.

Fry: This was when you said you would go down one by one to the piano?

Douglas: Yes. The house is here on the hill, and below, if you're looking out at the lake, were two buildings. There were two garages. One had a pool room upstairs, with a pool table that Father had brought from our home in the city. Then there was a chauffeur's room downstairs, and there was another little room. It was in that second room where the piano was; there we wouldn't disturb anybody when we had our lessons. The boys didn't take piano lessons; it was just Lillian and me. They had, years past, but not in the summers, no. They were doing other things.

Madame Sodarhuck, who lived in an apartment over the old Metropolitan Opera House--there were apartments that artists lived in there. I went to her later on to sing. Madame Sophia Cehanovska, who was the great teacher and coach who prepared me for opera in a remarkably short time, always claimed that Madame Sodarhuck did great injury to my voice, trying to make me into a mezzo, when I wasn't a mezzo, I was a soprano. It was just a strong soprano voice.

Anyway, Madame Sodarhuck was a character. She'd come, and her son would come with her. He wasn't very attractive. We didn't like her son very much, but they were here for two summers. She would give us not only advice about our voices and how to speak--we had to read poetry with her--but she would also make us go through calisthenics. Neither Lillian or I liked that, but through the calisthenics we went. That would usually be in the hottest part of the day, just before luncheon on the front porch there, looking out down the lake. We'd long to be down in the lake.

Douglas: All right; there was that kind of work that went on. Whatever Mother decided would be good for us, we got in the mornings in Vermont. It wasn't every summer, but there were enough summers so that the remembrance of that, and the image of that, is very strongly with me.

Every afternoon, of course, we swam--that just goes without saying. We used the canoes very much. The lake was about seven and a half miles around, and the length of the lake was I think, three miles. We would canoe down and back, and then we would all try to swim the length. I think I was the first one to swim the length of the lake--not back, but just down.

Fry: Did you have swimming lessons? Life-saving lessons?

Douglas: No, no. This all came later. For instance, all the grandchildren now have swimming lessons to [learn to] swim just exactly right, and life-saving lessons, and snorkle lessons, and goodness knows what they don't have. But we didn't have any of that. We had horseback riding lessons at the stables [down the road].

One summer when we were little children, Mother had rented a house somewhere near New York (I've forgotten where; it was a small town). Both Lillian and I had horses. We had a horse called Black Beauty, who had been a prize show horse. It had been given to Lillian and me by Father's partner, Mr. Alfred Liebmann. Then Mother rented another horse. Lillian and I rode all day long on horseback around the little town. We were never off the horses. I don't suppose we were more than, maybe, six and eight--certainly not more than that. We felt very much at home with horses, and felt that we could ride; we didn't need any lessons.

Well, when we came to Vermont, there was a very highly respected man at the head of the stables who also was the head of the riding stables at a girls' school. The families around the lake thought that he was very helpful in training their daughters to ride properly--you know, to ride for horse shows and all that. Well, that never interested me at all, to ride in a horse show. I just wanted to ride. So when I was put in the ring and was told to go around the ring: "No, put your hands this way, Miss Helen. No, pull your knees in further," I began to hate the whole thing.

My sister became a superb horsewoman, absolutely superb. She rode cross country, and she hurdled, and she rode so well that she broke her leg. She was thrown. She was riding a horse that hadn't really been broken in, in New Hampshire. She broke her ankle, which gave her trouble all her life, because the great clinic in Hanover (which is quite different now) set the ankle incorrectly, and it had to be rebroken. It was a tedious, painful experience then, and a continuing, everpresent pain throughout her life.

Douglas: Anyway, I didn't enjoy that one bit. I remember the days when we'd have to go down three times a week to have those riding lessons as anything but attractive. But that was part of what we did.

Fry: May I keep you on swimming for a little bit longer? Do you happen to have any stories about near-drownings or anything like that?

Douglas: No.

Fry: That never happened?

Douglas: No. Everybody was always able to swim, and the swimming was very safe here, you know. It isn't as it is in the ocean. There have been drownings in the lake, where young people have gone out into the lake and a storm comes up quickly and they don't know how to swim well enough. Now there is a regulation that requires every minor to have a life belt on when they're in a canoe or a motor boat on the lake--you can't go out without it. That was not true then; that was not true at that time.

Father and Mother objected to my swimming the length of the lake. Father thought it was stupid. He said, "What are you trying to prove? What are you going to do to your heart? You're not going to be a long-distance swimmer; why do you have to swim three miles? It's absurd." But there were days when it was very hot, and there were no lessons, when I stayed all day in the lake, pretending I was a fish, and just never came out of it. I loved the water; I've always loved water.

We walked in the woods. The woods were very wild all around the lake. (Now they've put through the big highway, which cut through this wood over here.) They made us feel we were off far, far from any human habitat.

That road really has injured those hills, I think, though the road is so beautiful; it's an incomparably beautiful road if you're on the road--that's 91, from here to Bradford. All the way out that road is very beautiful. But it has changed things, you know. It has brought the urban population into this area, and it has made one feel one is accessible. Whereas before we always felt we weren't accessible; indeed, you weren't.

It was very difficult to get here. It took hours in the car, because there were no big highways getting here. We'd get up at four o'clock in the morning, and we'd get here about five [in the afternoon]--if there was no misadventure. But suppose we began to have punctures? In those days they were rather common.

Douglas: I remember one trip up here, we came into Fairlee, the little town near the lake, on four rims. Mother had said, "We're not stopping any more to replace tires." [laughs] We came clattering into town.

Fry: Did you use the lake for fishing?

Douglas: Oh, yes, of course. Fishing was a great sport. I have one grandson whose idea of heaven is to fish. Then the little, little one coming along is kind of copying the middle boy, and he thinks fishing is a delightful way to spend an hour or two. I thought fishing was about as dreary as anything anybody could do.

Fry: It was so inactive?

Douglas: I don't know why. I just never was interested in fishing at all. I didn't like taking the fish off the hook; I didn't like any of it. My brothers would tease me about the fishing--that was one thing I didn't like to do that they did, and did very well. [One day] I was down in the boathouse, which was out in the lake. You went out to the boathouse on a little bridge, and then there was a big room that you came into. Then there was a stair that went down onto the pier that went out under the boathouse.

It was very hot one day and I went down there; I thought it would be cool there. Suddenly I saw a school of fish floating around, and I thought, "Oh, how gorgeous! I will fish, and show them I can fish." So I went out, and nobody was around; nobody noticed I was taking a fishing pole somewhere, which would have caused considerable comment, I can tell you. When next I appeared, about an hour later, I had a bucket full of fish.

Fry: They had just collected there in the lake?

Douglas: They came in the very hot time of the day in the middle of summer--we do have a few very warm days. It was their habit to swim under something--they'd come under rocks; they'd come under the dock there; they'd cluster around under shade. I came up to the house with the fish, very proud of my catch. They said, "Where did you get those?"

I said, "Down in the lake."

"Where on the lake, Helen?"

I said, "In the boathouse."

"In the boathouse? Do you call that fishing? That's the most unsportsmanlike way to fish there can be. It's all set up for you; there's a whole school of fish under the boathouse on hot days. How

Douglas: can you miss catching a fish? That's not fishing. You're a disgrace to the family." So that was the beginning and the end of my fishing. Never did I fish again.

We had picnics; there was a picnic a week. That meant preparation of food, which we children always went and brought in and helped to prepare. We would go to someplace that was very difficult to get to--that was part of the fun. You'd have to climb with packs on your back. Then we would make a campfire and there would be food that had to be cooked over it for supper. Then, if we were very good and Mother agreed, we could stay out all night.

We camped at least once or twice during the summer in the woods. We looked forward to it because we would wake up just as the sun was coming up. Of course, by noon we were exhausted. By the time we got home, all we could do was find a corner someplace and rest and pant. We were absolutely exhausted, because we couldn't sleep on the mountain very well.

It's a rocky terrain here, you know, so you were sure to have a rock under your head or between your shoulders, or in the middle of your back--it was anything but a comfortable sleep. Our idea of camping was not to take along mattresses, but to sleep on the earth.

Let me see what else we did. Of course there were always guests in the house. I don't remember my youngest brother having guests; he'd have friends, locally. But the older boys had guests always, and Lillian and I usually had guests. In the front of the house was a sleeping porch and all the girls slept on that. Next to it was another little sleeping porch separate, where Mother slept. Then there was a center room for dressing. Mother had her own bedroom across the hall. At the back of the house was a sleeping porch, and on that all the boys slept. There were just beds, right along, in a row.

Fry: Like a dormitory?

Douglas: Yes. It was a little different than it is now, because it's been changed somewhat. But that was the layout.

In the evening, a delight, which I think holds true for all children, was to make a fire in the fireplace, if the weather possibly permitted a fire, and we would toast marshmallows.

One trip that we made, walking, that wasn't as interesting as others, was to go into town as often as we were allowed to go, and have a soda. Really, it wasn't a soda that we went for, but it was a dish of vanilla ice cream with heavy marshmallow on top of it and

Douglas: chocolate sauce. The ice cream was homemade, and the marshmallow, somehow, was made at the drugstore. Well, that was about three and a half miles in, or four miles in, and four miles back; so that plate of ice cream—it was as if we had never had ice cream before in our lives. But we did love that.

We'd make trips, but not many trips, in cars.

Fry: Where did you buy the food?

Douglas: We bought the food in Fairlee and Bradford. But Mother got in her car every afternoon and was driven to various farmers around here. For instance, one farmer she would visit would have peas; another farmer would have carrots, or whatever was in season. Mother used to have a garden that a farmer came and put in for her. But the deer liked the garden, too, and in the early spring, before we could get up here, the deer would really finish the garden. So we gave that up.

They always spoke of us as Mrs. Gahagan's children, because they all knew Mother. It's only been in the last twenty years that I'm on my own. [laughter]

When I was in Congress, I came back here for one of Mother's birthdays. Mother was born in August, and we all came for Mother's birthday, always, from all over the place. A woman from one of the old families here, who had been here for generations, the head of the family, had been in the state legislature for a number of years, also came. I'm sure you know the custom at that time, almost every town had some kind of representation in the legislature.

Fry: A small state with a big legislature.

Douglas: That's right. And, as it was explained to me years ago, if a man or a woman had served for a length of time in the legislature, then they thought that person had been there long enough and it ought to go to somebody else. It was just that simple, because they were all Republicans; there was no problem about competition between the parties and the representation they'd have. It was just a question of passing it around, which I think was very good--and very democratic.

Well, I came back, and it was a shock that I was a Democrat. Apparently they had gotten word of all the things I was doing. It was Mother's birthday, and this lady was coming to the birthday party. They said, "You're going to the birthday party?"

[She said,] "Yes."

"But did you know that her daughter is here?"

Douglas: She said, "Yes, I know that."

"Well, are you going? She's a Democrat."

She said, "She is Helen Gahagan, the daughter of Mrs. Gahagan, and I am going to the birthday party, of course. I've known Helen since she was a little girl; of course I'm going to the birthday party." [laughs]

Fry: You became the resident Democrat, then.

Vermont Politics

Douglas: There are many more Democrats than when I first came back, in 1952, to spend summers here. Well, how can I describe the atmosphere? When I first came back, people would come to me--usually people who had worked one way or another for the family here. They would come and say [softly], "Miss Helen, you know, we're Democrats." [laughs] This was a great, deep secret that we had to keep. And I'd say, "Are you?" [They would say] "Yes." [I'd say] "Now, what do you think?"

So on the back porch here, I very often would be sitting, having political conversations with people from the countryside, who would come and want to talk about what was going on. The fact that I was here was kind of a "rock" that gave them a foundation, I think. Then other people would come, and I would say, "Well, did you know that so-and-so is a Democrat?" [They would say] "No." [I'd say] "Yes," because you don't have to declare at registration what you are here, you see. So there began to be this feeling that maybe there were other Democrats in this state, and they weren't so isolated; they weren't so peculiar to want to be a Democrat.

Now, I've noticed this last two years that the number of young people who declare their party without the same hesitancy as in years past is growing. They're very vigorous, very well educated, and very determined in supporting those programs in which they believe.

And, of course, so many of the programs now are at once recognized by Republicans and Democrats--the whole problem of ecology, the whole problem of how we allow this state to be developed from here out. Do we save this green state intelligently--not to prohibit the kind of industry coming in here, although I hesitate to use the word "industry," because heavy industry really doesn't belong in Vermont, I don't think. But do we set a pattern that will

Douglas: preserve the beauty of this state for those who want to come and visit or live here? Or do we recklessly go ahead without any thought to what we're doing to nature?

I think that at this moment we're in a very advantageous time. Vermont hasn't been spoiled yet, and there is general recognition that we must watch out before we undertake anything, and see where it's going to go; we're going to look ahead, as we haven't in years past. No one has. No one was evil when they plowed ahead; it just wasn't our policy. We weren't watchful; we weren't apprehensive of what we might do. If we were successful at a given undertaking--were making money and the thing, whatever it was, seemed to go--that was it. People were working, business was supported by the community. The fact that it was ruining the surrounding nature didn't seem to matter. Now that's not true here. So the Democrats are with the Republicans; so there isn't that great division between us, as there has been in the past on certain issues.

Fry: On important issues.

Douglas: Yes, yes. Then there's the whole issue of the nuclear power plants, and the growing awareness in Vermont extends to both Republicans and Democrats, as to the danger of nuclear power plants. So really it is the people against those in the power industry who are pushing for the plants. It's not Democrats against Republicans so much, as it has been on other issues throughout other parts of the country.

Here, as I say, the Democrats never surfaced before; well, they've surfaced now. We had, a few years ago, a Democratic governor. I think Hoff was the first Democratic governor. We now have another Democratic governor--Governor Salmon. There's going to be a live Democratic party here. It won't happen at once; it's predominantly still Republican, of course.

Fry: Does Vermont have a kind of bipartisan mentality that reminds you of California in the forties? Because I just found out that a candidate here can file under both parties; you can be a Republican and run for the state senate on the Republican ticket, but you can also put your name in the Democratic column. Does this affect the voter, in that it diminishes the meaning of parties, like it did in California in the forties and fifties?

Douglas: Well, that bipartisanship didn't go very deep, did it? It was really a means of getting more votes.

Fry: In California--getting more votes for the minority party, which was Republican. Now here, it would be getting more votes for the Democrats.

Douglas: That's right. But also, people here are more willing to listen-- today this is true--to an opposing point of view, as to the solution of a given problem, than they are in some areas of the country. I don't know; I don't really know. I don't think the Democrats I've talked to are in any way trying to fool anybody that they're Republicans. They hope, rather, that they will receive some Republican votes because the Republicans in this election, or another election, will support their programs over and above the candidate of the Republican party. And I think that was true to some extent in California.

Fry: Yes, they were party conscious, but--

Douglas: They were party conscious, and they hoped that they could win the votes of the opposing party for their programs. That is one of the reasons, I think, that there has developed, in states where this can happen, the effort to attack personally the opponent. So there would be even less need to consider the programs. Do you see what I mean?

If the person running, say, for the Congress in your party was discredited as an individual--as to his honesty, or where he really stood, or what he was really doing, and that he was suspect of having views that he hadn't expressed, and he was a danger to you; you know, all this kind of campaigning that has been deleterious to the democratic process--then you don't think about programs at all. You just have to vote for the other person. You don't dare vote for this person; you don't know what you'd get, you see. So I think that we ought to consider this business of cross-filing. Maybe it's not constructive at all. People ought to stand for their party, or reregister in the opposite party.

Fry: At any rate, getting back to the lake here, once you returned as Congressman Gahagan you were able to have your little forums on your porch and find more and more Democrats.

Douglas: And then there's been a growing demand for me to speak, on either side of the river, New Hampshire and Vermont.

Fry: In the state election campaign?

Douglas: In the state and federal elections, both.

Fry: Also in New York.

Douglas: Then people who knew me, wouldn't know in some little town, away from here, that I was living here. They wouldn't know I was here; they'd think I'm in California. People still think I'm living in California, you know, because we spend some time out there every

Douglas: year, every few years. So when the Ms magazine [article] was printed--and there's only one Fairlee, Vermont--then the mail that poured in here was very considerable, and that was because they knew where I was.

Fry: Here everybody can reach you.

Douglas: Yes. Fairlee's so small--all they have to say is, "Douglas-Fairlee" [laughs], or they have to say, "Vermont;" otherwise it might go to Virginia. There's a Fairlee, Virginia.

Fry: What about festive days around here?

Douglas: Well, there were always festive days, and that meant that there would be a party. It might be on the porch, or it might be in the dining room spilling out onto the porch, or in the back or the front of the house. That would be twenty-four--you start with the family, and you have twenty-four inlaws. And the preparation for that would go on for two days, the usual preparations that take place if there's a party in the country. There were always a number of those gatherings during the summer.

Fry: This would be like someone's birthday?

Douglas: Birthday, holidays--the Fourth of July, Memorial Day. This whole countryside, you see, stops, and they bring flowers to the graveyard. [On] the Fourth of July the old customs are carried on in the fairs--they sell food, they bring in the great big horses that go into the woods in the winter. Have you seen this?

They have blocks of cement or stone, and then they compete with one another to see which horses can pull the stone the furthest. They only have seconds to do it; so they would then compare the strength of the horses and the expertise of the driver in controlling the horses. Then there would be a winner, and that would mean that man and those horses in the big woods were better than another team and another driver, because they pull the big trees out, you see, in the snow.

Then they would have other games that go back a hundred and fifty years, and they would have those at those fairs. Usually people come up from the city to visit you, or come from other places, and in our home and in my brother's home over the hill there were always guests.

Then [during] the football period (he played in the Olympic games, football, my brother Walter) there were always people here for the games. I never liked football very much. I went once or twice and froze to death as a very young girl; you can imagine how I'd feel today. But there was always a houseful then.

Douglas: Then there was always Mother's birthday; then there was my brother's wife's mother's birthday, in September, and that was a big festive day. Then there were a number of birthdays of the grandchildren--there was always a party! Always a party! Then we just decided we wanted a party! So you put partying high up here on the list--how many parties during the summer, you know. It was part of the activity.

Now as we're older, up at my brother's house there's still this kind of activity. Our son has this kind of activity. It's a little changed, because he has three boys, and his wife is an anesthetist, and they work very hard. But also they're always carrying on, with parties and going places, and going to be part of the community as such things as the fiddlers. Do you know about the fiddlers?

Fry: No.

Douglas: The fiddlers come in here from round about--New Hampshire and Vermont--and they attend what I call...

Fry: A convention of fiddlers?

Douglas: No. Let me see. For years and years up at Newbury, Vermont, there has been a fair. At that fair the antique dealers will come in and show their wares. The Vermont people who are craftsmen will show their wares, in the hope that the county house there will show their wares. There will be a book sale. There will be paintings of the painters around Vermont. And there will be, in the green in front of the buildings, craftsmen displaying not only what they make, but making their wares in front of you.

The children gather round to watch how, for instance, a man working in leather works, or a man working in iron works. The man working in iron might be a blacksmith, but working; and since there are few blacksmiths around anymore, it's utterly fascinating for everybody. I give you those as examples, but there are many of them around. Then there will be food; there's always food. And then there's food sold.

Well, at the end of this festival, for the last few years, there is a gathering from the countryside round about, and there may be fifteen hundred people go to it, right in that same green that is the center of the town. It's not very big. These fiddlers come from all over, and people clap on the ones that they like, they scream and they yell, and all the young people go to that. My son never misses those festivities. And there's not only that one gathering of fiddlers, but there'll be a number round about the community; so they go to that.

Douglas: I went to one but I couldn't get Melvyn to one of these things. He went once; that's enough. He didn't go ever to the fiddlers, but he went once to one of the fairs. He'd seen that; that was enough. He doesn't like all that commotion around; he likes to read and to be quiet, and that's what he enjoys up here. Otherwise you're working all the time, between one party or another, or going out sailing, or going swimming. Of course, you know that we're at the top of the hill here, and when we go to swim you go down all those steps and then you have to climb up again. Well, Melvyn thinks three or four times before he does that. So we don't have the amount of activity around here that we had in the days when we were children, when Mother was head of the family, I must say.

Fry: I suspect your mother chose a house at the top of a hill with an idea to draining off some of the surplus energy of her children, going up and down to the lake. It's a marvelous technique. [laughs]

Douglas: I don't know about that, but anyway--So I think that gives you a picture. I may have forgotten some things. Today we drive to Hanover, which is very quick, for food. We can get food here in town; we can buy food in town, we can get it in Bradford. But we buy our food either in Fairlee, or we drive to Hanover and buy it at the co-op there, there's a very fine store. We go to Hanover for many other things. They have one of the great libraries attached to the university. And then there's the Hopkins Center; there's a cultural center which is most attractive.

Fry: Did you read any, in the summers here? Now you have a library here.

Douglas: Oh, yes, we always read. In the summers we read a lot of history, and early history here in Vermont--the Green Mountain Boys, and that kind of book.

Fry: Helen, would you want to give the evolution of this house, as your father fixed it up?

Douglas: Is that interesting to anybody?

Remodeling the Gahagan House

Fry: What changes did your father make in this house?

Douglas: Well, the original house is here, just as it was--the outside of the house. There have been no structural changes within, except to take down walls. For instance, in the main part of the house there was a large bedroom. Mother took down the walls between the living room

Douglas: and the dining room, making one big room, and part of the bedroom. So the bedroom is much smaller; it isn't a bedroom now, at all. It's used as a little extra library. So that's one big room.

The windows are small—the house was built in 1889. They're big windows, but they're small in comparison with these big picture windows that we have in this room where we're sitting now. So Father first put in a big window at the end of the dining room, facing the drive as you come up to the house. Later, I added a big window over here; and I added a window in what was the bedroom, across the whole room.

Father added to the house. The original house looked like a cake, with the center of the house, and this big porch around, and then there was a smaller house up above it. It really looked like kind of a wedding cake. At one side, the left, coming right out and looking over the whole lake here, there was a breezeway. Father added to that, and I don't remember whether that breezeway was there originally or not. I would think so, because usually there was a breezeway. He added to that two maids rooms on the second floor, a big bath downstairs, and a tool room.

Melvyn and I redid that whole wing, because we didn't have maids, then, when we came back. We've had it made over very primitively, for guests. We thought that wasn't very nice to have guests and ask them to go downstairs to the bath; we were afraid they'd fall down and hurt themselves. So we've turned the two rooms upstairs into one room, where you're sleeping, and had a proper bath [installed].

Downstairs, the breezeway and what was downstairs here--the whole length of the building--is one big room, and there are windows all the way around. We all like windows, to look out; we always like to get the view. Father did that in our house in Brooklyn, too, with huge windows, and anyway he had other windows, you know. There were never enough, to look out at the greenery.

So, now, let's see. Upstairs there was the center of the house, and at that time there were three bedrooms and a big bath, when we came here. Father added the sleeping porch in front, the sleeping porch in back. A few years later, Mother was crowded and didn't want to be with all those girls in front, and the little sleeping porch over the roof was made for Mother. Those sleeping porches came out over the roofs that formed the ceiling over the porches.

What else? There was an extra bath that was added upstairs; there was a half-bath added down in what was the bedroom, down here --or maybe that was always there; I've forgotten myself. Then when

Douglas: we came back here after '52 we had bookshelves made. We sold our house in California, and Melvyn had a large library and I did, too; so we cut the libraries down--took out everything that we wouldn't want to keep in the years ahead. The body of our books are up here now, and I have them upstairs, too, you know; they're not all down here. We still have books in New York, and I'm always packing up a number of boxes of books each year that we read and we're finished with and we bring up here. Otherwise we'd suffocate down in New York, because we really don't have proper book space down there.

I think basically that's it, except for the buildings around here. There was the boathouse that was part of this house that we always used. That was brought back onto the land, because [the father of] our neighbor, Mr. Kenneth Loeb, told my father that it obstructed his view. So Father said if it did, he'd move it back, which he did. Father went ahead and made it into a house.

Originally it had been one big room, and people came on Sunday to worship, because the lady who built this house in 1889, when there was no road around the lake and the wood was brought up over the lake to build this house and the house next door and one other house halfway down the lake, was very religious. She would bring a minister here--I don't know whether they came every Sunday or not --and service would be held in that one big room. The benches that you see on the porch were the benches where the parishioners sat. They would come to church in their boats. So they'd come to the end of the lake, perhaps, and hire a boat and come up the lake, because there was no road around the lake then. They'd tie their boats under the boathouse, out in the lake, and then walk down the planks to where the stairs were going up to the second floor, where the meeting would be held.

Well, that's a proper house. That has now, today, the porch, the big room--and Father built a porch around with arches in the porch, which is really very handsome. It has an enormous fireplace there. Then there was added a dining room and a modern kitchen. Upstairs there are one, two, three, four bedrooms and two baths. And there's a maid's room downstairs and a bath, off of the living room. So it's very commodious. Now that house, that I've just described, belongs now to my brother. I have Mother's old house. I say "Mother's" because Mother did everything with it, you know; it was Father's too, of course.

Where the garages were, that was made into a house years ago.

Fry: That's where the pool table is from?

Douglas: That's right. It still is there; the pool table's still there. That was given to my sister. We all have certain interests in this property, which we received from Father and Mother when they died. That has been made into a house and was given to my sister, and she gave it to her son, who is a sculptor and painter, and his children use it now. That goes right down to the water on that side. So that's really it. The property, altogether, is owned by the family, and it goes down to the gate. It's about four and a half acres, five acres; it's not very large, really. It's larger than most of these places around the lake, because you can't get that kind of property now.

But my brother has a big place, which he's had for years, up above here, with three hundred and fifty acres, or four hundred acres. That's beautiful. Of course, nothing has happened to that; it's just wild and beautiful. Our view is beautiful here, looking right here at the lake. But his view looks out over the mountains, everywhere. You see the White Mountains over here, the Green Mountains are surrounding us here—we're right on the edge of the Green Mountains, as they flow into the White Mountains.

Attachment to Vermont

Fry: You want to add this little piece to put back in the Vermont section?

Douglas: Very probably I should describe a little my feeling for Vermont, my affection for the countryside; my complete comfortableness with the climate here. Climate makes such a difference for everyone. California always seemed to me very dry, and my skin has a tendency to feel dry. I use oils exclusively; I never use creams or anything like that. I have the feeling my skin dries very quickly, and it makes me very uncomfortable.

Here, the air is moist; the ground is always producing green trees, green fields. The scenery is ever changing, as to light and as to topography. For instance, you don't come to great open spaces as you do in the desert; or you don't come to areas in very high mountains where the sun only lasts a little time. There are mountains, but they're not the very high mountains. You move from one valley to another, and every valley is different; there are no two valleys the same.

Douglas: No two hours in the day are exactly the same because the light changes. All that I find very agreeable and very satisfying, and very intoxicating. I'm always talking about the light and saying to Melvyn, "Look, look at the light! Look now at what's happening to the trees! I think Melvyn sometimes gets so tired; he says, "I see it, Helen; I see it."

As a child, when I first came here, I loved it, just loved it. Then I didn't realize how much Vermont had taken hold of me. When I went back to New York, I would dream about Vermont, and I would feel very unhappy there. I would think, "Oh, when can I go?" I would imagine that I was here, walking in the woods. I would long to have that sense that one has in the woods. Do you remember last night when we were talking? The man from Outward Bound was talking about the silence, how people hadn't heard silence. My brother was talking about that, too.

Well, I heard silence very young here, you know. I was at one with the silence I heard. When it would come time to return to Vermont, I began to urge the family, "Can't we go early? Do we have to stay until the end of school? Why can't we leave a little bit early? What difference does it make? It's all over; there are only the festivities."

When we would drive up here I'd always get out of the car down below on the road and run the last way. When I came to our driveway, coming up the hill, I would hug every tree and talk to them. I'd say, "Oh, I'm so glad we're here. Oh, how did you get through the winter?"

When I left here, when I was in the theater and music and everything else, I was always terribly disappointed to think I couldn't be here in the summer. I was always conscious I was away from Vermont. When we went to California I loved the people in California, and I loved California. But I was never physically comfortable, and never really physically comfortable in cities, either. Very often I would find myself thinking of Vermont and visualizing Vermont.

I began, way back then, imagining myself living in this old house. All the people who lived here, the Vermonters, called any house that summer people lived in a "camp." That's part of the turn-of-the-century jargon. I always disliked the term "camp." It wasn't a camp, I said to people; it's a house! My idea of a camp is just a roof and four walls--very uncomfortable.

Anyway, I began imagining what could be done to this house to make it a livable, year-around house. I remember my brother's amazement when we sold the house in California. I think in a sense

Douglas: immediately I said to myself, without saying it to Melvyn or anybody—just almost subconsciously it took over immediately—"I will have the house in Vermont; I will have the house in Vermont." I think when I said to my brother that I was going to be here, he was first of all very happy that I was going to be here with them, and not away someplace else. I could have gone back to California and bought a place in Carmel again, or we could have gone somewhere else—in Connecticut. I didn't want to go any of those places; I wanted to be here [pounds the table].

The pull of other places had to do with people, because I don't have the kind of friendships here that I had other places. I've developed them since we've come back. I don't really have the long friendships I've had over the years, that I have in California and in New York, and that I have in other states in the Union. But it's the place itself.

And then I like the people who live here all the time. I like the way the farmers think; I like the way they behave; I like the way they [help each other] if there's trouble in the community or any family. Say a farm burns down, or someone is very ill in a family, or there's a death: everyone comes to help. They still do the homely things that indicate human reactions to someone in trouble.

And the relations are intimate enough—the community is small enough—for that to take place. It's not possible for anybody to be in trouble in the community or to have a death in the community that everyone doesn't know about it. It reminds me always when there's a death in the community here of one of Emily Dickinson's poems about death. You know immediately; you're "with it" immediately; you know what has happened in the family.

Fry: Would you like to read the poem?

Douglas: I don't have it here, but the one poem exactly that I'm thinking of is the poem that she writes as though she were a child, and she says, "You know next door when someone dies," and then that man that comes, and they throw out the mattresses, and they throw out this, and then that terrible day when they're all there and leave.

Vermont has for me the kind of attraction that places have for those who are separated from some place where they really feel at home, and long to go back, and are never quite happy anyplace else. You know, it has that kind of attraction, which I understood when I came back here after a while, that you read about in the stories about the early days when people would cross the country, and the hardships. They would see extraordinary sights that were beautiful and all, and yet certain of the women would long for another part of the country.

Fry: To go back?

Douglas: To go back, and never to get over that sense of being away from home. Really, it's home.

Fry: Helen, when you were here as a young person, did you have other friends your age in this area? Or did you play mostly with each other?

Douglas: We played with each other and with friends. Yes, we had friends among summer people who came in. Now it's different with my son's (our son's) little boy, and it's different with my sister's grandchildren who are here. You met Noel the other day, who is in college now. They have made friends in the community of permanent residents. And my little boy--you remember Mrs. Smith, whom we passed on the road and she called out to me and said, "How are you?"

Fry: Yes.

Douglas: She has nine children, the way Mrs. Rafferty does. Her youngest boy is a very good friend of young Peter Alexander Douglas, my son's youngest boy. Peter Alexander loves this little boy very much. We didn't have that kind of friendship here--that kind of continuing friendship. We did have friends around the lake, and they've been our friends for years and years and years. I can think of a few cases. There were a few girls and boys around the lake, but they were lake people. Now, I'm talking about the residents who live here all the time. All the new generations are friends with the residents.

No, it was an intoxication with the place, and that's the difference from everyplace else that I was, where it was always the people. For instance, what I missed most when I left California were the people. Why am I happy to go back to California? It's the people. Now, I understand the grandeur of the view on the ocean there, as you go up and down, it's spectacular. But Carmel always left me--maybe it was too much, you know? It doesn't speak to me as the valleys do here, and the constant change, and the constant sense of being with nature here.

Fry: Yes, it's a more human scale of beauty here.

Douglas: Right, and you really feel part of it. And the silence you hear at night; you don't hear a sound anyplace! Not a sound!

Fry: One single leaf falling.

Douglas: Well, there were quite a few yesterday. They're piled high outside. You really have to struggle with nature here. Maybe I like that, too.

Fry: That puts you in closer contact with it, too.

Douglas: I remember what a disappointment it was for me when Melvyn came here first. It was just after we were married. I so wanted him to love the place. Well, of course there were so many Gahagans around that he was just suffocating; he didn't feel at ease one moment. He obviously didn't like it, and I took him up to the top of the mountain here, and thought, "Wouldn't he love it there? Isn't this beautiful?" He looked uncomfortable, and didn't seem to be at home at all. It was a great disappointment, and for years I thought about it.

Then when we came back here Mel was very sweet--when I said I wanted to come back here. We came back, but we weren't here all the time at once. I came first to the lower house, and this house was closed altogether. Then little by little I came and restored things here. It wasn't, I guess, for about two years or three years that I really came here in the summer and opened it up and began to take over.

Fry: And make it into your permanent home.

Douglas: Right. When people would say, "Where do you live?" I would say, "Vermont." They would say, "But you live in New York." I said, I know, I know; we have an apartment there. We don't live in New York in the sense of 'living.'"

Now Melvyn, to my joy, is beginning to turn into a Vermonter, in the sense that he, too, watches the color. He always watched the birds. But I always thought, maybe I loved it too much, and so I got in the way of his appreciation, which can happen. Now I feel that he, too, is beginning to be taken over by Vermont. Because this fall, for the first time, I had to go down and was away from here so much. Melvyn was left here, and our little house-keeper told me, and then he told me when he came to New York, that he hated to leave. He said it was so quiet and so peaceful: "I hated to leave." I thought, "Aha," to myself, "you'll soon be trapped. That'll be good. Maybe we'll even stay here through the winter and freeze to death."

My sister-in-law has that feeling; my brother has that feeling about Vermont.

Fry: The ones we visited last night?

Douglas: Yes. She's at home in the woods. That's no exaggeration, what Walter was saying. She's an aviatrix, among other things. She tested Grumman planes in the war. She loves it here.

Fry: Do they still hike up into the hills?

Douglas: Oh, yes. She has trouble with her foot. She was talking to Walter about the trouble she's been having lately. She broke it skiing here in the winter. I don't ski. I skied once.

I went to Capen School for girls at Northampton. I had never skied. All the family skied. There were a lot of things that I didn't do that they did. So I watched this skiing and thought, "There's nothing to that. Why do they make so much of skiing?" So I went to the highest place. I'd gotten a pair of skis for myself from the instructor or somebody there, and they said, "You haven't skied before, have you? Don't you want to...?" I said, "No, no, I see what they do. You lean over; you must be sure to lean over like this as you go down the hill." Well, I did, and as I went down I kept leaning over more and more and more, and suddenly I hit a rock or a bump or something, and over I went into the snow immediately. Why I didn't break my neck I don't know, because my neck went right in. I was laid up in bed for a couple of weeks in school, and the teachers didn't look favorably on that at all. That was the beginning and end of my skiing.

Golf? They all played golf, except Lilli; Lilli never played golf. But the boys, of course, all played golf. I never wanted to compete with them in golf, at all. But I went one day to see what it was like to play golf. At that time the golf course that's down here, that's so lovely now--the greens and the trees--was nothing but a barren field. It was the ugliest thing you ever looked at. I couldn't imagine why anybody would want to go down there in the sun and knock that little ball around. So, once again, I would take no instruction, and I took this stick and hit myself in the head and almost knocked myself out. That was the beginning and end of my golf.

Very simply, I got rid of a lot of activities in a very quick and abrupt way. [laughter]

Fry: Is there any sport that you like besides swimming?

Douglas: Swimming, walking; and riding horseback. I enjoyed that, up to the point where they had that fancy German man making me sit a certain way, hold my knees a certain way. I hated all that; I wanted to know my horse and be on my horse, and just go out riding. I hated all that other stuff. I loathed it.

What else? I play tennis. I don't think I was ever very expert, but I've played tennis.

Fry: I don't think we mentioned that your father built the tennis court out here.

Douglas: Well, Father was a very good tennis player, and it used to be maddening, because he would come up for a few days and he'd stand at one end of the court and play tennis with us. But he wouldn't move! Father was the size of Walter--very tall and broad shouldered.

Fry: About 6'3"?

Douglas: Yes. He would just stand still, and his long arms would reach--he would just move that one arm and he'd beat any one of us, and we'd be running all over the court.

So that's Vermont. This kind of intoxication happens to other people--intoxication with the land, with a certain area of land, a certain place in the world--but it doesn't happen to everybody. My sister hated it here. She felt lonesome, restless when she was here, from the time she was a child. She loved the ocean; she was only happy when she was on the ocean. Now this is something in our makeup, which is curious. I like the ocean, too, very much; but the choice between the ocean and here is not a choice for me. Because you get tired of the ocean; you don't get tired here, because it's never the same.

Fry: I wish we could put a verbal picture of what this is like right now. You've brought your plants indoors, and they're sitting by what we would call in California your patio door, which leads down the steps to the lake.

Douglas: You see what happened in this room. When we redid this room out here, I wanted to put windows all the way around, and I succeeded in doing it. Melvyn said, "You're building that room that way so that you can come up here in early spring and late fall; but you're going to freeze to death out there with those windows." I said, "Why? They're going to be thermo-paned. Why are we going to freeze? Why do you want to be closed in a house so you can't see outside?" Father had that, too. Father's idea was to be in a room and then open it all up with windows so you could see, and you had to be in the country in order to see.

Fry: That room you're talking about has the lake on three sides of it, so you really can see.

Douglas: Oh, I'll tell you a funny story. I told you yesterday that we had a hurricane here two years ago. We called it a mini hurricane--mini only because it was short. In violence it was a full hurricane. It struck erratically around the lake. Mary Helen, our daughter, and I had come from Hanover, Dartmouth College, and we had come up the road one half of a second before the biggest tree in this area fell across our road and down across my nephew's road, just below.

Douglas: Both roads were blocked, over the hill. We would have been killed, absolutely. When we got here, Melvyn kept motioning us to stay in the car, because for the minute and a half or two minutes (I've forgotten the exact time) of the winds...

Fry: It sounds like a tornado.

Douglas: That's what it was--a mini tornado. He was afraid we would have been blown off the hill; and we would have been. When it was over, of course, the place was in a shambles, right here. It hit our hill, and we lost about thirty or forty trees. They were down all over; you couldn't get out of the place. We have electricity here for the pump--the artesian well; we have electricity for the stove; we have electricity for the lights; and the telephone isn't electricity, but the wires were down. So we had nothing!

Melvyn sat curled up on that sofa, looking outside at this. Mary and I went out immediately. We put on our heaviest coats, and out we went to see what could be done and what had to be done so we could get out of the place. Melvyn looked so distressed, as if it had been a personal attack upon him, and I was so interested and fascinated by this.

You know, you really are "with it" when you're in a storm here. You could see it coming; you could see it take over. It's exhilarating, in a sense, to be caught. You don't feel it the same way in a city; you don't feel a storm the same way at all. But you really feel in the middle of it here. You know how powerless you are. At once, it's a fearful experience, but it's an experience where you really are with nature. You really do feel this world that we live on, and how fragile we are, and how fragile the world itself is when the winds come, or when the rains come as we had the year before, when the rains didn't stop. It was raining for a week and a half without interruption, and the floods were terrible. The roads went out all over the place here. You may have heard of it, even in California. They were opening the dam down the river, the biggest dams. They would open the little rivers that came into the bigger tributaries. Dams were opened, people that lived near the river were evacuated.

Anyway, Melvyn acted as though I had caused this windstorm, because I enjoyed it so. He looked at me as if I'd brought it all about, because I had no right to enjoy it. How could I be so stupid as to enjoy it. Didn't I understand what had happened? Didn't I understand the danger of such a windstorm?

Fry: I can see that you're loving every facet of Vermont and its weather.

Douglas: Loving it because I feel at home with it! That's the difference: if you don't feel at home in a setting and a climate, then you don't love it, of course, because you feel strange.

Fry: Did a part of you always feel a little bit strange in California?

Douglas: Yes, I did--physically.

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Final Typist: Marie Herold

TAPE GUIDE -- Helen Gahagan Douglas -- Volume IV -- Congresswoman, Actress,
and Opera Singer

- Interview 1: April 4, 1973
Santa Barbara, California
2 reel to reel tapes
- Interview 2: April 6, 1973
Santa Barbara, California
2 reel to reel tapes
- Interview 3: April 20, 1973
San Francisco, California
3 cassettes
- Interview 3: April 20, 1973
San Francisco, California
1 30-minute video tape, 1/2 inch reel to reel*
call # E390
- Interview 4: May 6, 1973
New York City, New York
2 reel to reel tapes
- Interview 5: May 14, 1973
New York City, New York
1 cassette
- Interview 6: October 31, 1974)
Lake Morey, Vermont)
5 tapes
- Interview 7: November 1, 1974)
Lake Morey, Vermont)
- Interview 8: August 1, 1976
Lake Morey, Vermont
2 reel to reel tapes
- Interview 9: September 14, 1976
Lake Morey, Vermont
2 reel to reel tapes

*Available through Educational Television Office, 9 Dwinelle Hall,
University of California at Berkeley

GAHAGAN FAMILY GENEALOGY - 1973

by Helen Gahagan Douglas

My great, great grandfather was of Scotch-Irish decent and was William Gahagan, born in 1773 and died in 1845. His family came to this country and settled first in Pennsylvania, where he was born. William Gahagan helped settle Dayton, Ohio on the Miami River. He was a dispatch bearer for Gen. Anthony Wayne. He was one of a party of fifteen men who went up the Ohio River in 1796; he was then eighteen years old. In 1796, he married Nancy Hamer, the daughter of one of the fifteen men who went up the Ohio, River in 1796. In 1805 William Gahagan moved with Nancy to land which later became part of Troy, Ohio. (Their son, William Hamer Gahagan, was born in 1805.) This land was granted to him in Dec. 1st, 1809 by James Madison. Later he bought more land which he subsequently gave to Troy to build a church on, either Methodist or Presbyterian, and land as a burial ground. One of the provisions of the Gift of Deed was that if the graves were ever dug up this land was to revert to the heirs.

William Hamer Gahagan, son of William Gahagan had a son named William Henry Harrison Gahagan, born in 1835 and died in 1877. He fought in the Civil War, got ix dysentery, was discharged, and died shortly thereafter. In 1863, he ^{had} married Hannah Maria Smith. She was quite a woman. She attended Antioch, Ohio College around 1856 when Horace Mann was its head. Hannah was the President of the Troy, Ohio or Miami County D.A.R., President of the Womens Christian Temperance Union, and President of the Womens Relief Corp (Civil War). She had three children, Walter Gahagan, Mary Gahagan Clyde, and Bess Gahagan ?

Material mentioned on Page 1 of interview.

--by Helen Gahagan Douglas, 1973

Partial Gahagan Family Genedlogy

The land on which my great, great grandfather and grandmother, William and Nancy settled came to be known as the Gahagan Prairie. Today this land is part of Troy, Ohio. William and Nancy bought land in addition to that dded to them, which they subsequently gave to Troy so that a church could be built and land set aside for a burial ground. One of the provisions of the gift of deed was that if the graves were ever dug up, this land was to révert to the heirs. The graves were dug up in this 20th century, and a school was built on the land. The heirs--my father and his sister, Mary Clyde, did not protest. They aproved/of the building of the school. William and Nancy Gahagan had a son, William Hammer Gahagan born in 1805. William Hammer Gahagan had a son named William Henry Harrison Gahagan born in 1835. In 1863 he married Hannah Maria Smith. He fought in the Civil War, became seriously ill with dysentery, was discharged, and died shortly thereafter. Hannah Gahagan, my grandmother, carried on. She had three children, my father and two daughters, Mary and Bess. Hannah's father sent her to college, Antioch, around 1856 when Horace Mann was it's head. After attending two years, her father took her out of Antioch because of the pressure of relatives and friends who thought higher education for a woman was undesireable; in fact, down right handicapping. Grandmother Hannah always said, "One might lose everything or have everything taken away, except what was in one's head." Hannah Gahagan was President of the D.A.R. either in Troy, Ohio or Miami County; President of the Women's Relief Corp, Civil War; and much later, President of the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

Our Cory, Smith and Culbertson maternal ancestors date back to Ireland and Scotland.

John Cory I - first known in Scotland 1644 was a whale commissioner, came to Southold L.I. about this time.

You may not want to have the Smith or Culbertson records as both Smith and Culbertson male married a Cory and a Gahagan.

No authentic record of when the Gahagans came to this country but proof that they descended from the Irish Kings of Ireland.

Wm. Gahagan I - of Scotch Irish descent, was first known as native of Pennsylvania. (b. 1773, d. 1845) (m. Nancy Hamor) in Dayton, Ohio, whose father was the first Methodist minister of the early settlement in Dayton.

Wm. Gahagan enlisted to fight the Indians of the North West. Came down the Ohio River to join Gen. Wayne's Army and was made a dispatch bearer at the age of 19 years.

Sons of Wm. & Nancy Gahagan:

John William Gahagan (b. Nov. 9, 1801 - d. 1839) (m. Mahala Ivers) no children.

Solomon Gahagan (b. 1803) disappeared (1823) on trip to New Orleans and never heard from.

Wm. Hamer Gahagan II (b. March 16, 1805) Dayton, Ohio. (d. April 14, 1870) (m. Hester Culbertson, Aug 8, 1827) in Troy, Ohio. (Hester's parents were first cousins)

Wm. Hamer Gahagan had moved to Miami Co, near Troy and entered a section of land from Govt. known as the Gahagan prairie.

Third Generation:

Wm. Henry Harrison Gahagan (called Harry, son of Wm. Hamer and Hester) (b. Nov. 14, 1835 - d. Dec. 4, 1877) (m. Hannah Smith, April 2, 1863 in New Carlisle, Ohio)

Wm. H. H. Gahagan, a sort of country squire, esthetic, wore silk vests and never worked.

Issue of Wm. H. H. & Hannah in Troy, Ohio on Gahagan Farm:

Walter Hamer Gahagan

Mary E. Gahagan

Bessie Gahagan

The Culbertsons were always merchants of dry goods.

The Gahagans were contractors, engineers and builders.

Wm. Hamer Gahagan was well liked, public spirited. Organized many public entertainments, such as County Fairs and Citizens Committees - Thro his influences the study of the drama, particularly of Shakespeare and they called themselves by the name of "Theopian" from Thespis (Father of Greek tragedy). They presented plays by Shakespeare and he is said to have memorized many passages and while walking the streets to and from home spoke them aloud, gesturing with his cane - as a builder he built the home where his children, Anna, Mary, Emma, Jane and Harry grew to adult age.

Wm. H. H. Gahagan responded to the call of President Lincoln for 75000 troops the second day after Fort Irumptor was fired upon. Was a member of 11th regiment O.V.I. composed of men from Troy, Piqua and Miami Co. He was elected Lieutenant (this is mentioned in life of Abraham Lincoln by Nicoloy). He was wounded seriously, later returned home and married Hannah Smith, but always more or less troubled by the wound which eventually caused his early death.

He was interested in farming (what had been called Gahagan prairie) and in stock raising owning fine horses, and President of Miami Co. Argicultural Board. Lieutenant Gahagan was widely known, commanded the esteem and respect of all persons for his genial and kindly disposition. (besides being very handsome added by his daughter Mary)

Now you know about Walter Hamer his son and his 3 sons

MY DEMOCRATIC CREDO

SPEECH

OF

HON. HELEN GAHAGAN DOUGLAS

BLOW UP OR GROW UP

Mrs. DOUGLAS of California. Mr. Speaker, I think we all know that communism is no real threat to the democratic institutions of our country.

But the irresponsible way the term "communism" is used to falsely label the things the majority of us believe in can be very dangerous.

I do not think communism in Russia need prevent international cooperation in building the peace, any more than it prevented international cooperation in winning the war.

I know that the road ahead is not without difficulty or without its vexing problems, but, if we could solve the difficulties and the problems that arose during the war, surely we can solve them in peace.

We solved them in war because we had to. If we had not, we would all now be slaves of the Axis Nations.

We will solve them in peace if we fully realize the grim fact that, if we do not, civilization has run its course.

We have reached a point where war can no longer be the final recourse. We have reached a point where we either grow up or blow up.

If it is blow up, the issues over which we struggle today are meaningless.

JEALOUS FOR DEMOCRACY

I have asked to talk about communism. But I am also going to talk about democracy—democracy, which I strive daily to live—democracy, which is the only form of society in which I believe—the principles of which were fed to me with my first spoon of cereal—democracy, which my forefathers helped establish on this great continent.

I shall talk about democracy because it is democracy that we believe in and live by—or should live by. We are in-

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terested in communism as a system that challenges democracy. I am not afraid of that challenge.

I do not think we value democracy highly enough. The great mass of the American people will never exchange democracy for communism as long as democracy fulfills its promise. The best way to keep communism out of our country is to keep democracy in it—to keep constantly before our eyes and minds the achievements and the goals which we, a free people, have accomplished and intend to accomplish in the future under our own democratic system.

I am jealous for democracy. I do not like to see the things that democracy can accomplish credited to communism. Through the years democracy has given the people of the United States more freedom and a higher standard of living than any other system that we know—and it has done so with less inequity, less persecution, less infringement on the rights of free thinking, free speech, and free action than under any other form of government anywhere else in the world. I do not want the things that democracy has done ascribed to anything other than the democratic process.

I am jealous for the school system we have built under democracy, and I do not want its extension, including fair salaries for teachers, day nurseries, school-lunch programs, and Federal aid to education, called communism.

I am jealous for the reputation of our democratic institutions to achieve a high level of employment, and I do not want to see measures for increasing that employment attributed to communism.

I am jealous for my belief, and the belief of millions of other Americans, that in our democracy the Government is the servant of the people, and that, as the servant of the people, it will protect the people—all of us, Protestant, Catholic, Jew, or gentile; black, white, or yellow. I do not like to have that belief, the

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very cornerstone of our greatness, disavowed and called communistic.

I am jealous for that greatest of all our institutions the American home. I pay my disrespect to those short-sighted individuals who called our housing program for our returning service men and women, the program which would have helped millions of them to start their homes, communistic.

I believe now, and I shall always believe, that this Government of the people is capable of self-growth, is capable of making whatever adjustments are needed in a world that has changed so greatly since the days when my great-grandfather, the Reverend William Harrison Gahagan, helped found Dayton, Ohio.

I do not claim that democracy, as we now know it, is perfect, but I know that it has the capacity to remedy its own imperfections, and I do not want to hear each remedy called communism.

REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PEOPLE

I have a respect that amounts to reverence for our kind of Government and for this body of which I am privileged to be a Member.

As a child, the Congress of the United States was to me the symbol of freedom. It was the embodiment of all the great phrases and words that I had heard spoken in my home and at school, words I memorized in my heart and mind.

"Sweet land of liberty," "We, the people of the United States," "One Nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all," "A Government of the people, by the people, for the people," "the land of the free and the home of the brave," "From every mountainside let freedom ring!"

As a very little girl I stood holding my father's hand and looked upon the Members of this body. In my childish way I thought to myself how wonderful to be a Member of the Congress of the United States—to speak for the people—to be a part of the people's Government.

All the years that followed, I, as many other Members of this House earned in

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a few weeks what we are paid here in a year. But the privilege and satisfaction of becoming a Member of this House are greater than any I ever enjoyed outside. For I still feel now, as I felt as a child, that the confidence of people in their Representatives whom they have freely chosen, is in itself the greatest reward—and cannot be measured by any material standards.

That confidence demands that we give to our role our hearts, our minds, the whole of all our talents. It is here, so long as we are permitted to serve as Members of this House, that the greatest of all possible rewards is found. For the greatest of all possible trust has been given to us, a trust, to protect the liberties of the people and fulfill their hopes.

This is the role, as a representative of the people, which I cherish above all I have ever held, or could ever dream of holding.

CAUSES OF COMMUNISM

It is as a representative of the people, a democratic people, who believe in the principles and future of democracy—that I now speak about communism.

There is no word in the world today more misused or misunderstood. I, for one, would not pretend to give a final definition of the word.

I have no special contribution to make on the subject. I am not a student of communism. I have not been to Russia.

That, however, does not mean that I have not thought about communism and tried to understand it and take an objective view toward it. One of the most important things today is for the American people to try to understand the Russian people and the Russian people to understand us.

I think we do a disservice to democracy when we dismiss communism as the devil's handiwork. Of course, there is competition between democracy and communism in the world today.

There is no doubt in my mind that the result will continue to be the tri-

umph of democracy in the world if we spend our energy and genius in demonstrating to the world what democracy can do.

One-sixth of the globe today, an area as large as the United States, India, and China combined is inhabited by people who are living under a form of State socialism known as communism.

Primarily as the result of geographic isolation, these people since the Middle Ages had lived under the cruelest, most barbaric autocracy in world history. Under the czars, the nobility held huge estates. There was a relatively small trading class and working class of artisans. In 1917, when the revolution began, there were only 10,000,000 industrial workers in the whole country. There were many more millions of peasants who worked the land with the most primitive tools and methods; mentally and physically debased, almost to the level of animals, and who until less than a hundred years ago were bought and sold like the animals on the land of the big estates on which they lived and worked.

When Lenin with the philosophy of Marx and Engel arrived in Petrograd in the midst of a revolt against the czars and the war, there was small wonder that the Russian people followed him who promised bread and freedom.

In other words, communism was born out of hunger, slavery, illiteracy, superstition, degradation.

WE HAVE DEMOCRACY

But, communism has no place in our society. We have something better. We have democracy. Communist methods are foreign to ours. Their policies are superimposed from the top and you take it from the top whether you like it or not.

Under our democratic system, programs are proposed from many sources in the community. A candidate running for office stands for a certain program, and the people elect him or reject him on the basis of that program. In other

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words, the people themselves select or reject what is good for them. We do not believe that one man or a group of men can save the people. We believe that the people save themselves.

The Soviets have never developed certain rights which to us are fundamental—the civil rights we cherish, the political rights we so boisterously and vigorously enjoy. They have sacrificed the competitive free-enterprise system we believe in.

Since the war I think we all must admit that some good things have been accomplished under communism for the Russian people.

But, communism is the receiver which takes over when bankruptcy takes place.

It is our job, not only to see that bankruptcy never takes place here, but that through democratic processes the welfare and security of the people which are what make a society solvent increase day by day

FIGHTING WINDMILLS

The fear of communism in this country is not rational. And that irrational fear of communism is being deliberately used in many quarters to blind us to our real problems. The spreading of this fear is in fact propaganda for communism.

I am nauseated and sick to death of the vicious and deliberate way the word Communist has been forged into a weapon and used against those who organize and raise their voices in defense of democratic ideals—of hearing the very program which was initiated by Franklin Roosevelt and which the majority of the American people voted for in four successive national elections and to which President Truman has dedicated himself in his twenty-one point program called Communistic by those who seek to defeat the majority will of the American people.

Communism could successfully invade only a weakened democracy. A vigorous democracy—a democracy in which there are freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of religion and freedom

of speech—would never succumb to communism or any other ism.

Our fight is not against the windmill of communism in America. Rather it is against those who would make a treadmill of democracy through special privilege, bigotry, and intolerance.

Those who serve democracy and the future of democracy best are those who believe that full employment and fair employment practices can be achieved under our free enterprise system and who fight for full employment and fair employment practices through the democratic process.

It is up to us, the people, to show that we can have full employment and full production and freedom at the same time. That is a test democracy faces.

FREE ENTERPRISE

Nobody believes in free enterprise or its future more than I do. I have had all the benefits of this free enterprise system. I was bred in a family that handed down its business from father to son, a family that believed and believes today that individual initiative is the source of our economic vitality. I had every advantage and every opportunity that a child born into that kind of family would have.

It is because I know what education and opportunity and the respect of the community mean in the development of human beings that I fight for them for everyone.

I have never been in a breadline. I have never had to live on a ditch bank. I am not one of the millions who has never known a doctor's care.

I was not one of those 200,000 women a year who give birth to their children without medical attention. I do not belong to a minority—at least, I do not think the Irish are considered a minority in America any more.

But I have been in the slums of America. I have been to the ditch bank and have seen the people who come out of the cities because there was no place for them there. I have seen the people who

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were blown off, tractorized off, or because of lack of markets were pushed off the land.

I have seen their miserable cars with all their worldly belongings strapped to them wending their weary way through State after State, millions in all, hunting for a job, hunting for somewhere beside the road to lay their heads.

I have seen shanty towns where the dust blinded and choked—where there was no water to relieve the thirst—no water to wash sick children, or when it rained rivers ran through the tents or the improvised shanties.

I have seen children with sore eyes and swollen bellies. I have looked deep into the despairing eyes of fathers and mothers without jobs—or hope of jobs. I have seen minorities humiliated and denied full citizenship. And I tell you that we betray the basic principle upon which this Government of free people was founded unless this Government of the people finds a way by which all the people can live out their lives in dignity and decency.

FREE FOR EVERYBODY

Yes, I believe in free enterprise. I believe in it so much that the whole object of my participation in government as a representative of the people is to make it free, free for everybody.

It is a good thing to own your own business, your own farm. The problem that confronts this Congress is that not enough people own their own businesses and their own farms. The test again and again is whether we side with the great monopolies or with the people. The great monopolies are suffocating free enterprise and, if not halted in their growth, will in the end destroy not only their own dynasties but democracy itself.

Only 10,000 persons own one-quarter and 75,000 persons own one-half of all the corporate stock in this country. Only 61,000 persons out of 130,000,000 collect half the dividends.

The war Franklin D. Roosevelt talked about in 1936 is still going on. It is, as he said, "a war for the survival of de-

mocracy," and the battle should not rage around the bogus issue of communism but around the real issue of monopoly and the exploitation of the people and their resources.

MONOPOLIES

Monopolies did not build America. It was not monopoly which built our great industrial economy. It was competitive enterprises which later were too often strangled by the forces of monopoly. Typically, our plants, factories, mines, and mills were built by enterprising businessmen, creating income for their respective communities. But after the factory was built, too often it was taken over by the large combine, the Wall Street group.

Not only did monopoly fail to contribute materially to the development of our industrial structure, it actually promoted illegal price fixing and the restriction of production which resulted in underconsumption and unemployment.

Monopoly, through cartels, contributed seriously to our industrial unpreparedness for war by restricting the production and distribution of such vital materials as magnesium, synthetic rubber, aviation gasoline, and electrical equipment and many other products.

Monopoly deeply affects the spiritual and economic lives of those who live in communities which it dominates.

In a study prepared by the Smaller War Plants Corporation and printed as Senate Document 165, a comparison was made of the levels of civic welfare in what were termed "big-business" as against "small-business" cities. It was found that in the big-business cities—those in which most of the working population was employed by a few large plants or absentee-owned corporations—the level of civic welfare was lower than in small-business cities—those in which most of the workers were employed in many small, locally owned businesses.

It was found that the chance that a baby would die within 1 year after birth was considerably greater in big- than in small-business cities.

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Slums were more prevalent in the "big business" cities.

The "big business" cities had less home ownership; they spent less per capita on health, on public recreation, and on public libraries; and they had a lower degree of church membership than did comparable "small business" cities of the same size located in the same area, possessing the same type of population.

These are only a few manifestations of the lower levels of civil welfare which were found to prevail in the "big business" cities.

The alternative to this concentration is its very opposite—more privately owned business, more employers competing for the respect of the community, more participation in ownership.

Democracy cannot long survive when the people permit their lives to be dominated—economically or politically—by a powerful few.

MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK

We must make democracy work. We must realize the greatness that is in America. We are proud of our past and proudest because of what we can build upon that past. We do not want to turn our eyes backward and to keep the dead hand of the past upon our growth. And above all we want to shake off the deadening hand of monopoly.

We must reverse the trend to monopoly. We must enlarge the opportunities for all, with our magnificent capacities for production and distribution. It is in this atmosphere of hope and freedom that we became great and shall go forward to new leadership in the world. It is in this setting that we can undertake to provide new security and well-being for all our people, rather than much for the few and little for the many.

To make democracy work we must recognize its real enemies. And one of the most dangerous of its enemies is intolerance borne of fear and loss of faith in America.

Tolerance which purges the worst air of liberty.

I do not agree with everything that is said. But I will fight with the last ounce of my strength for the right of people to say what they will.

PRIVILEGED TO MAKE MISTAKES

One of the great privileges of democracy is the privilege to make mistakes—the privilege to say foolish things, the privilege to expound ideas with which others violently disagree, the privilege to say them without being tracked down and labeled as subversive, the privilege to criticize our Representatives mercilessly, whoever they may be, and, next to the secret ballot, the greatest privileges of all are the right to organize and defeat or elect candidates to public office. The whole history of American politics is the history of vigorous and often violent disagreements.

We believe and we have shown by experience that we can afford these luxuries—these luxuries which are a necessity of democracy—because in a people's government balance is found and kept in the final voice of the majority; the majority which at all times defends the minority. There is no danger in letting people have their say. We have proved that. There is only danger when you try to stop them from saying it.

This, the most powerful nation on earth, stands today as irrefutable proof that there is no danger in a conglomeration of peoples and ideas freely expressed. In fact, out of the very conglomeration a rich harvest, which is the growth of America, has been reaped.

SUSPICION

There is a danger in the hysteria that always follows war. That danger is suspicion—suspicion that breeds in ignorance, thrives on bigotry, reaches epidemic proportions on hysteria.

Tom Paine said:

Suspicion is the companion of mean souls and the bane of all good society.

This is true at home and abroad, as true in 1946 as it was in 1776. And

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former Secretary of State and War Henry L. Stimson wrote a few days ago:

The chief lesson I have learned in a long life is that the only way to make a man trustworthy is to trust him; and the surest way to make him untrustworthy is to distrust him and show your distrust.

Mr. Stimson said this in reference to the atomic bomb and our international relations, but what is true of international relations is also true here at home.

We, the Members of this body, will fall in our duty if we permit suspicion of another's purpose to divert us from our own purpose—that of making democracy function at full efficiency for our own people.

WE CANNOT FAIL

To be sure there are Communists in America. There are a few people in America who believe the free enterprise system has run its course. As I have made clear, here today, I share no such belief. But to attack each new development in the progress of American democracy, as communism, is to dig the grave of government of the people, by the people, for the people.

If we succeed in the practice of democracy communism will never take over, as some faint-hearted but loud-mouthed have proclaimed.

We cannot fail if we carry forward into the future the principles which have made America great.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

Mr. Speaker, this body must always be loyal to the principles of its founders and the teachings of its fathers.

It must never yield to the tyranny of bigotry.

It must never succumb to the rantings of the demagog.

It must always be the forum where justice is dispensed and intolerance is displaced.

It must be the protector of free speech and the guardian of free worship.

It must never become an arena where class is arrayed against class—where race hatreds are bred and suspicions nourished.

We, the Members of this Congress—chosen by a free people to protect their rights and to bring to reality their hopes and faiths—are not bigots. We do not believe in name calling. We do not agree that everyone who disagrees with

690387—16212

us should be hunted down like a criminal, denied his civil rights, and deprived of his ability to earn a living.

We, the Members of this House, do not believe that Capitol Hill is a hill on which to kindle a fiery cross but rather one on which to display the shining cross which since Calvary has been to all the world the symbol of the brotherhood of man.

SPEECH
OF
HON. HELEN GAHAGAN DOUGLAS
OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
March 29, 1946

DOUGLAS-MARCANTONIO VOTING RECORD

Many persons have requested a comparison of the voting records of Congresswoman Helen Douglas and the notorious Communist party-liner, Congressman Vito Marcantonio of New York.

Mrs. Douglas and Marcantonio have been members of Congress together since January 1, 1945. During that period, Mrs. Douglas voted the same as Marcantonio 354 times. While it should not be expected that a member of the House of Representatives should always vote in opposition to Marcantonio, it is significant to note, not only the great number of times which Mrs. Douglas voted in agreement with him, but also the issues on which almost without exception they always saw eye to eye, to-wit: Un-American Activities and Internal Security.

Here is the Record!

VOTES AGAINST COMMITTEE ON UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES

Both Douglas and Marcantonio voted against establishing the Committee on Un-American Activities. 1/3/45. Bill passed.

Both voted on three separate occasions against contempt proceedings against persons and organizations which refused to reveal records or answer whether they were Communists. 4/16/46, 6/26/46, 11/24/47. Bills passed.

Both voted on four separate occasions against allowing funds for investigation by the Un-American Activities Committee. 5/17/46, 3/9/48, 2/9/49, 3/25/50. (The last vote was 348 to 12.) All bills passed.

COMMUNIST-LINE FOREIGN POLICY VOTES

Both voted against Greek-Turkish Aid Bill. 5/9/47. (It has been established that without this aid Greece and Turkey would long since have gone behind the Iron Curtain.) Bill passed.

Both voted on two occasions against free press amendment to UNRRA appropriation bill, providing that no funds should be furnished any country which refused to allow free access to the news of activities of the UNRRA by press and radio representatives of the United States. 11/1/45, 6/28/46. Bills passed. (This would in effect have denied American relief funds to Communist dominated countries.)

Both voted against refusing Foreign Relief to Soviet-dominated countries UNLESS supervised by Americans. 4/30/47. Bill passed 324 to 75.

VOTE AGAINST NATIONAL DEFENSE

Both voted against the Selective Service Act of 1948. 6/18/48. Bill passed.

ON ALL OF THE ABOVE VOTES which have occurred since Congressman Nixon took office on January 1, 1947, HE has voted exactly opposite to the Douglas-Marcantonio Axis!

After studying the voting comparison between Mrs. Douglas and Marcantonio, is it any wonder that the Communist line newspaper, the Daily People's World, in its lead editorial on January 31, 1950, labeled Congressman Nixon as "The Man To Beat" in this Senate race and that the Communist newspaper, the New York Daily Worker, in the issue of July 28, 1947, selected Mrs. Douglas along with Marcantonio as "One of the Heroes of the 80th Congress."

REMEMBER! The United States Senate votes on ratifying international treaties and confirming presidential appointments. Would California send Marcantonio to the United States Senate?

VOTES AGAINST LOYALTY AND SECURITY LEGISLATION

Both voted on two separate occasions against bills requiring loyalty checks for Federal employees. 7/15/47, 6/29/49. Bills passed.

Both voted against the Subversive Activities Control Act of 1948, requiring registration with the Attorney General of Communist party members and communist controlled organizations. Bill passed, 319 to 58. 5/19/48. AND AFTER KOREA both again voted against it. Bill passed 8/29/50, 354 to 20.

AFTER KOREA, on July 12, 1950, Marcantonio and Douglas and 12 others voted against the Security Bill, to permit the heads of key National Defense departments, such as the Atomic Energy Commission, to discharge government workers found to be poor security risks! Bill passed, 327 to 14.

VOTE AGAINST CALIFORNIA

Both recorded against confirming title to Tidelands in California and the other states affected. 4/30/48. Bill passed 257-29.

VOTES AGAINST CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATION OF COMMUNIST AND OTHER ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES

Both voted against investigating the "whitewash" of the AMERASIA case. 4/18/46. Bill passed.

Both voted against investigating why the Soviet Union was buying as many as 60,000 United States patents at one time. 3/4/47. Bill passed.

Both voted against continuing investigation of numerous instances of illegal actions by OPA and the War Labor Board. 1/18/45. Bill passed.

Both voted on two occasions against allowing Congress to have access to government records necessary to the conduct of investigations by Senate and House Committees. 4/22/48, 5/13/48. Bills passed.

NIXON FOR U. S. SENATOR CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA
John Walton Dinkelspiel, Chairman
1151 Market Street
San Francisco—Underhill 3-1416

CENTRAL CALIFORNIA
S. M. Hebllick, Chairman
820 Van Ness Avenue
Fresno—Phone 44116

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
Bernard Brennan, Chairman
117 W. 9th St., Los Angeles
TRinity 0661

Note: Copy reduced from original 8-1/2 x 14 inches. Printed on pink paper.

September 19, 1956

Peter Edson
Scripps-Howard Newspapers
Washington, D. C.

In answer to your telegram. In the California Senate race of 1950 I was busy campaigning and never myself heard Mr. Nixon speak. I do not doubt that he was much too wise to have called me a communist in so many words. But at the time there was no question in my mind or in the minds of those working with me and supporting me that the entire Nixon campaign was deliberately designed to create the impression that I was a communist or at least quote communistic unquote. Example, I refer you to the now famous pink sheet used by Mr. Nixon in the 1950 Senatorial campaign. A flyer printed on pink paper which spoke of the Douglas Marcantonio axis and said I had voted with Marcantonio 354 times in the House of Representatives. Marcantonio was a New York Congressman and a party-line spokesman for the pro-communist American Labor Party. The pink sheet gave the impression to the reader who was not too well acquainted with the workings of Congress that there was a Marcantonio program presented in the House of Representatives which I supported 354 times. There never was such a program, as you know. The suggestion that there was and that I supported it adds up to what? I ask you? I served in the Congress six years. Democrats controlled Congress for four of those years. Republicans for two of them. One voted for or against a democratic program or for or against a Republican program. Marcantonio voted with the Democrats or with the Republicans. As Life Magazine recently reported the pink sheet was distributed by Nixon workers together with quote a leaflet bearing the suggestive title is Helen Douglas a Democrat. The Record says No. unquote. What was I supposed to be? A republican?

Regards.

Helen Coburn Douglas

Committee on Foreign Affairs

House of Representatives

Washington

Resolution of Esteem and Good Wishes

Extended to

Hon. Helen Gehagan Douglas

Johnston
Chairman.

J. M. Richards

Joseph L. Pfeiffer

Thomas P. Gordon

Mike Mansfield

James E. Morgan

Laurie C. Battle

Myr Minter

Asy Barnahan

Sumner Cook

Clement J. Zablocki

A. A. Ribicoff

Oran Burleson

Boyd Crawford

Charles A. Eaton,

Robert B. Chipfield

John M. Dwyer

Frances P. Bolton

Lawrence H. Smith

Chester E. Menow

Walter H. Judd

James G. Fulton

W. Harris

John Davis Lodge

Arnold Jackson

Committee on Foreign Affairs

House of Representatives

Washington

December 31, 1950

Resolution of Esteem and Good Wishes

Extended to

Hon. Helen Gahagan Douglas

Whereas the Honorable Helen Gahagan Douglas has served as Representative in Congress of the Fourteenth District of California from the Seventy-ninth Congress through the Eighty-first Congress, and has demonstrated a constant devotion to the public good; and

Whereas her diligence and wisdom have been of particular value on the Committee on Foreign Affairs, of which she has been a Member throughout her career in the House of Representatives; and

Whereas her retirement from the House of Representatives brings a sense of loss to those who appreciate the value of her faithful collaboration in the development of United States foreign policy in a fateful period of the history of this Nation: Therefore be it

Resolved, By the Committee on Foreign Affairs, that an expression of esteem and good wishes be extended to the Honorable Helen Gahagan Douglas in the name of all of her colleagues on the Committee.

Helen Gahagan Douglas, Ex-Congresswoman, Dies

Los Angeles Times
June 29, 1980

By PATT MORRISON
Times Staff Writer

Helen Gahagan Douglas, the actress-turned-congresswoman who lost the 1950 U.S. Senate race to Richard M. Nixon in one of the most vitriolic campaigns in the state's history, died Saturday in a New York cancer hospital. She was 79.

The New Jersey-born Democrat was a stage star and operatic singer who moved to the California film community and eventually to California politics. She was a three-term congresswoman whose McCarthy-era votes against funding for the House Un-American Activities Committee and opposition to contempt citations for the "Hollywood Ten" prompted opponents—including Nixon—to label her "soft on communism."

That charge, and the nickname "pink lady," which clung to her throughout the campaign, were enough to give then-Congressman Nixon—fresh from the investigation that led to the January, 1950, perjury conviction of Alger Hiss—a 60% vote in his bitterly fought campaign against Mrs. Douglas. That race ended her political career.

During that campaign, Mrs. Douglas accused her opponent of conducting a campaign of "fear and hysteria."

Nixon, she said, "is throwing up a smoke screen of smears, innuendos and half-truths to try to confuse and mislead . . . I despise totalitarianism in any form—fascism, Nazism or communism. I despise the cheap thinking that is being injected into this campaign in California and throughout the country."

Mrs. Douglas had entered Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center a week ago, according to a family spokesman, for treatment of a recurrence of cancer. She had undergone a mastectomy seven years ago, a quarter-century after introducing a bill urging researchers to pool their efforts to combat cancer.

At her side when she died early Saturday morning were Oscar-winning actor Melvyn Douglas, her husband of 49 years, and her daughter, Mary Helen. Her son, Peter, had visited her the day before, the spokesman said.

Mrs. Douglas' professional life crossed a spectrum of careers: Reared in Brooklyn she was a Barnard College student in 1922 when she made her theater debut in "Dreams for Sale" and later appeared in such plays as "Trelawney of the Wells" and "Mary of Scotland" before taking voice lessons that eventually took her to the operatic stage.

She sang in three languages and on two continents, performing in "Aida" and "Tosca" in Vienna, Budapest and Prague before returning to the United States and a Hollywood Bowl engagement in the late 1930s.

While she was performing in "Tonight or Never" in 1930, she met Douglas, whom she married in 1931. Together they went to Hollywood to star in "She," the 1935 film about the fantastic goddess-queen of the H. Rider Haggard novel.

Of the character, Mrs. Douglas said then, "She ruled her kingdom by terror and she herself was fear-ridden. Personally I've never been afraid of anything—at least I can't think of anything right now."

It was in California that Mrs. Douglas took up political cudgels, testifying in mid-1940 before an Assembly subcommittee about the housing problems of migrant workers during the Depression.

Within a few months, she was selected as a Democratic national committeewoman from California, working for the party ticket in the November elections against GOP presidential candidate Wendell Willkie. Asked at the time if she had a message for the state's Democrats, she said "Yes,—do not underestimate our opponents. They are working every street, alley and boulevard." As early as that 1940 campaign, charges of "reputed leftist support" began to be leveled at Mrs. Douglas, whose newcomer status and social and economic beliefs caused concern and disgruntlement among some of Southern California's Democratic women.

Appointed as a civil defense volunteer by President Franklin D. Roosevelt shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Mrs. Douglas was chosen in 1944 as the Democratic nominee for Congress in Los Angeles' 14th District amid "carpetbagging" charges. She did not live in the district, and although that was not then a condition of candidacy, one opponent called her "a political gypsy who is trying to push her tent into the 14th District."

Mrs. Douglas won a close race, and by the time of her swearing-in in 1945, she and blonde Connecticut Republican representative Clare Boothe Luce were being called the "congressional glamour girls."

Her appointment to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, where she served for three terms, put her in the spotlight on post-war international issues, although it was on domestic matters that Mrs. Douglas encountered her most vehement criticism.

She was one of only 17 representatives who voted against contempt citations for the "Hollywood Ten," writers and entertainers who, to her "personal regret," re-

fused to answer questions about their alleged Communist Party membership before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

In 1950, when Sen. Sheridan Downey retired, Mrs. Douglas decided to run for the Senate. It was a campaign in which her voting record—including opposition to a \$150,000 appropriation for HUAC and to subversive activities control bill requiring

registration of Communists—was used as evidence of her alleged leftist sympathies.

But Mrs. Douglas declared herself opposed to Communist aggressions abroad, saying, "The Cold War launched by Communist imperialists has been a costly, nerve-racking and distasteful affair."

Difficulties dogged her Senate campaign, in which her opponents dubbed her "the pink lady." A group of USC students, in what was later described as a fraternity initiation prank, sprayed her with seltzer water and threw hay at her as she spoke on campus.

One reporter, present when Mrs. Douglas was speaking at an Orange County rally, said the candidate left the podium in tears after hecklers disrupted the meeting, booing her speech and distributing leaflets hinting at her alleged communistic leanings. The leaflets were printed on pink paper.

Nixon's Southern California campaign manager, Bernard Brennan, said late in 1950 that Mrs. Douglas' record "discloses the truth about her soft attitude toward communism."

Although she was supported in her bid by many Eastern Democrats, Mrs. Douglas encountered divisiveness among Democrats in her own state. When she lost the 1950 election to Nixon, she declared later, "To me, politics is not a career, but a service. By being defeated, I did not give up my rights as an American citizen."

The bitter scars left by the 1950 campaign did not fade. As many as 10 years later, she had eggs thrown at her in Boston during a speech on foreign policy.

But more than two decades later, there was a measure of satisfaction.

During Nixon's dark Watergate days, bumper stickers proclaimed: "Don't Blame Me—I Voted for Helen Gahagan Douglas."

After the 1950 loss, she returned briefly to the stage, acting with the late Basil Rathbone, giving concerts and poetry readings and working on her memoirs.

Family spokesmen said there will be an autopsy, for the benefit of cancer research, before her body is cremated. Memorial service plans are incomplete.

Helen Gahagan Douglas, 79, Actress and Nixon Foe, Dies

By EDITH EVANS ASBURY

Helen Gahagan Douglas, the actress and former United States Representative whose defeat in 1950 for a Senate seat from California launched Richard M. Nixon into national prominence, died early yesterday at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. She was 79 years old and lived on Riverside Drive in Manhattan.

At her bedside were her husband, Melvyn Douglas, the actor, and their daughter, Mary Helen. Mrs. Douglas, who underwent surgery for cancer seven years ago, suffered a recurrence of the illness three years ago and entered the hospital a week before her death.

Mrs. Douglas's life was marked by sudden, unpredictable changes, usually the result of her own firm choice, always followed through with courage.

The child of affluent parents, she was born on Nov. 25, 1900, in Boonton, N.J., where her parents happened to be briefly. She grew up in Brooklyn in a closely knit family that included a sister and three brothers at a time when Brooklyn had a Driving and Riding Club and private schools for its own elite.

Her father, Walter H. Gahagan, an Ohio-born engineer, had a large construction business in Brooklyn and a shipyard in Arverne, Queens. Her mother had been a schoolteacher before marriage.

Broadway Star at 22

At 22, Helen Gahagan was a Broadway star, hailed as one of the 10 most beautiful women in the world. She went to Europe to sing in opera, went back to Broadway stardom again, married her leading man, Melvyn Douglas, and moved with him to California. There Mr. Douglas went on to co-star with Greta Garbo, Gloria Swanson, Marlene Dietrich and other movie queens of the 1930's.

Mrs. Douglas began championing liberal causes in California and, after having a son, Peter, in 1934, and a daughter, Mary Helen, in 1938, she plunged into politics. She became a Democratic national committeewoman in 1940 and was elected, with labor support, to represent California's 14th Congressional District in 1944. The district included Los Angeles.

After three terms in the House, Mrs. Douglas ran for the Senate in 1950. Her defeat in that contest was probably the first serious setback of her life. It also brought her a kind of dubious lasting fame.

Her successful opponent, Mr. Nixon, without actually stating that she was a Communist, stressed her liberalism in a way that made her appear to be one. The tactics were often later attacked, — but not by Mrs. Douglas. Whenever she was invited to criticize Mr. Nixon's conduct in that campaign, she refused. "One must always look to the future, not the past," she would insist.

To run for the Senate, Mrs. Douglas had given up her House seat. Her defeat

by Mr. Nixon left her out of public office, and she never ran for one again. She returned to the theater and concert stage occasionally during the 1950's and continued to be active as a private citizen in behalf of liberal causes and Democratic candidates who espoused them.

The sheltered Brooklyn girl — "I was chaperoned practically all the time until I was married," she told an interviewer in 1971 — became an actress through sheer determination in the face of explicit opposition from her parents.

At Barnard College, where her parents had enrolled her to keep an eye on their daughter in a futile attempt to dissuade her from her acting career, Helen Gahagan coached the Wig and Cues Dramatic club, wrote plays in her English course and acted in them.

Harry Wagstaff Gribble, a playwright and director, saw her in one of these amateur productions and offered her the leading role in his play "Shoot." She was the only nonprofessional in the cast, and the only one singled out for praise by the critics.

Ten days later, she appeared in another play, in a minor part, which was seen by William A. Brady, a producer. He announced that she was "the coming Ethel Barrymore," signed her to a five-year contract and put her in the leading role of "Dreams for Sale." It opened to rave reviews in September 1922 at the Playhouse Theater, and overnight Helen Gahagan was a Broadway star.

Sang in Opera in Europe

As the play opened, the new semester was beginning at Barnard. After reading the reviews, Miss Gahagan saw no reason why she should go back for a third and fourth year. The play lasted only a week, but she went on to other starring roles, and other laudatory reviews. She began to study singing and went to Europe to appear in opera. But then word came that her father was seriously ill and she abandoned her tour, rushing home in October 1930.

A month later, she returned to Broadway in a singing role, in David Belasco's production of "Tonight or Never." Her leading man was Mr. Douglas, a newcomer to Broadway who had polished his acting in stock companies in the Middle West. While the play was still running, they were married on April 5, 1931, at the Gahagan family home at 17 Prospect Park West, Brooklyn, a few months after her father died.

Mrs. Douglas's life changed in many directions after her marriage. The couple drove across the country to take up residence in California and new careers in motion pictures.

On the way, they encountered migratory workers searching for jobs after the economic collapse of 1929 and were profoundly affected. Mrs. Douglas took up the study of economic and social prob-

lems, began organizing relief campaigns and to take an interest in politics.

In 1937, Mrs. Douglas returned from a concert tour through Central Europe with her political education further enhanced. Her accompanist, who was Jewish, like her husband, had not been invited to the parties given for her, and she had been forbidden to sing "Jewish" music. She canceled her contract to sing there the following year and began working for organizations opposed to the Nazis, as well as for the migrants, whose numbers had soared.

Mr. Douglas, who like his wife was accused of being a Communist sympathizer, served in the Army in the Burma-China theater in World War II (he was also in the armed forces in World War I, enlisting by exaggerating his age) and was discharged a major. He resumed acting and directing in Hollywood, but after Mrs. Douglas's political career ended, they moved back to New York, where they remained.

One of Mrs. Douglas's final public pleas was an appeal to Congress for Federal funds for cancer research. On June 19, 1979, she spoke to a Congressional hearing in Washington by telephone from the bedroom of her Riverside Drive apartment, a frail but determined figure braced by pillows and cushions.

She had "learned a lot about terminal cancer" since her Congressional days, she told the hearing, in a voice amplified for the audience there. "My father, a brother and my only sister died of it."

Dr. William Cahan, a cancer specialist and her physician, was in the room as she spoke. At a bridge table against the wall, piled high with files, clippings and books,

a young actor doing research for her was typing notes she had dictated for the autobiography she was determined to finish.

Mrs. Douglas was persuaded to write the autobiography by a literary agent who had suggested that it would be a good way to take her mind off her illness.

"Later, I discovered she had cancer and she died," Mrs. Douglas said of the agent during an interview in the summer of 1979. "It's as if I have a commitment to her to finish the book, before I pass on."

"When they wanted to give me drugs to ease the pain I wouldn't let them," she said. "I want to keep my mind as clear as I can as long as I can. I never wrote a book before, but I used to write my own speeches."

Nan Stevens, the Douglases' secretary, said yesterday that most of the manuscript had been delivered to her publisher, Doubleday's, but that Mrs. Douglas was still finishing the final chapter she was planning to write. It was to cover her 1950 Senate race in California.

Mrs. Douglas also wanted to add an epilogue, Mrs. Stevens reported. She said that Mrs. Douglas's editors should be able to complete the book with the materials she was putting together for the final part.

Besides her husband and daughter, Mrs. Douglas is survived by a son, Peter; a stepson, Gregory Hesselberg; a brother, Walter H. Gahagan; and several grandchildren.

The family said there would be no funeral, and contributions in lieu of flowers should be made to the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. A memorial service was to be held later at an as yet undetermined time and place in New York or Vermont.

H. L. Mitchell
Co-Founder, Historic
Southern Tenant Farmers Union

Box 2617, Montgomery, Ala. 36105

Tel. 205-265-4700

Dear Friend:

I thought you would like to see the attached about Helen Douglas, who died on June 28 1980

Sincerely

Mitch



HELEN GAHAGAN DOUGLAS
 1901--1980

A truly great person died of cancer in New York City on June 28, 1980. She was Helen Douglas, wife of Malvyn Douglas the screen star. But Helen Douglas was well known in her own right as an artist of stage and screen, and she was even better known as one of the few people who reached down to give a helping hand to the migratory farm worker, the sharecropper and the small farmer—the forgotten people of this land.

I first met Helen Douglas soon after she was elected to Congress to represent the people of the 14th District of California in the House of Representatives. I had just left the South to become the first and only spokesman for the nation's farm workers in Washington, D.C. My wife Dorothy and I constituted the smallest lobby in the capital for twelve long years. Helen Douglas introduced a series of bills to give the farm worker equality with the industrial worker.

At the time of the strike of 1,100 farm workers on the giant DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation Ranch in Kern County California, Helen Douglas led a group of people out to the picket lines. Among these was Chat Huntley of the NBC network. It was not long after that visit that an attempt was made to wipe out the strike leadership by gunfire. A blast from an automatic rifle was undoubtedly intended to kill Hank Hasiwar, the chief organizer for the National Farm Labor Union AFL. (I was the National President of the NFLU). However, Jimmy Price, the leader of the Kern County Farm Labor Union was seriously wounded. Interestingly, the company doctor at DiGiorgio refused to come and give first aid to Price as he lay in a pool of blood. Price almost died en route to a hospital eighteen miles away.

Helen Douglas, like other decent Americans, was outraged at this crime. She enlisted the help of those whom she knew in the movie industry. The Hollywood Film Council composed of all the unions in the industry produced a powerful and effective motion picture entitled "Poverty in the Valley of Plenty." Without the support of Ronald Reagan, then President of the Screen Actors Guild, who raised much of the money required to produce the film about the plight of the farm workers, "Poverty in the Valley of Plenty," might never have been produced. Reagan in those days was not quite as far to the right as he is now. (At this point in time, Corporate America seems determined to ride into the sunset of oblivion with Ronald Reagan, and to carry the rest of the United States along.)

The DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation lost hundreds of thousands of dollars in profits as the little farm labor union mounted a boycott, and showed "Poverty in the Valley of Plenty" even to a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives. The Corporation, with the connivance of Richard Nixon, got a court edict and managed to remove the movie from circulation.

With the support of Helen Douglas and others in and out of Congress whom she inspired, our Union called upon President Harry S Truman to create an investigative commission. In a monumental report on Migratory Labor in American Agriculture, the foundation was laid for subsequent legislation enacted over the next twenty years, including the removal of the exemption of farm workers from inclusion in any and all social welfare legislation.

At about the same time the Commission was engaged in its study, Helen Douglas became a Democratic Candidate for the United States Senate. Richard Nixon, running for the same seat, branded Helen Douglas as a subversive because she had given help to the forgotten men and women out on the ditch banks and in the barrios and ghettos of the cities. Nixon, in one of his pre-Watergate dirty tricks had red paint thrown on Helen Douglas during a political rally. Nixon won the election, and the way was paved for a scoundrel to become President of the United States.

After losing out in Congress, Helen Douglas continued her activity in behalf of the nation's farm workers as a private citizen. She joined Eleanor Roosevelt, Frank P. Graham, A. Philip Randolph and other distinguished Americans in establishing the National Advisory Council on Farm Labor. In February of 1959 this committee held an open hearing in Washington. During the course of the two days' session Helen Douglas narrated a drama "Out of Their Poverty." At this hearing the spokesman for the AFL-CIO pledged that the labor movement of this country would launch a campaign to unionize farm workers. It was at this time that the movement of farm workers now led by Cesar Chavez was actually initiated, and Helen Douglas, the farm workers' friend was there.

Over the following years, whenever I was in New York City I made it a practice to call Helen Douglas. A few times I visited her apartment out on Riverside Drive. It was early in 1976 when we had a talk about presidential politics, and as usual I expressed my dismay at the prospects offered by the democrats and gave my opinion of both Jerry Ford and Ronald Reagan, the contenders for the republican nomination. Never did I hear Helen Douglas say anything derogatory about any person. However, her reply then was, "Mitch, at least Ronnie is intelligent." She had known Reagan in Hollywood and had served with Ford in Congress.

While Helen Douglas was still in Congress there occurred one of those affairs that happen only in New York or Washington-- where people assemble for lunch, dinner, or sometimes afternoon cocktails or tea, to hear prominent people talk about some insignificant organization or individual who is being given an award. In 1949 I was so honored by being given the Clendening Award by the Workers Defense League, for service to minority rights. Helen Douglas was there, along with Secretary of Agriculture Charles Brannan, Ralph Wright, Assistant Secretary of Labor, Senator Paul H. Douglas of Illinois and the eloquent Mordecai Johnson, President of Howard University. Helen Douglas said of me, "Mr. Mitchell is a soft spoken warm hearted friend of a group of forgotten people. I have always considered Mr. Mitchell to be something of a sainted man."

I should like to say of Helen Douglas that she was a soft spoken, warm hearted friend and sainted person-- whose like we shall see no more.

FROM

Mitch

**H. L. Mitchell
Co-Founder, Historic
Southern Tenant Farmers Union**

Box 2617, Montgomery, Ala. 36105

Tel. 205-265-4700

The Unitarian Church of All Souls

1157 LEXINGTON AVENUE • NEW YORK, N. Y. 10021 • LE 5-5530

*A Memorial Service
to Celebrate the Life of*
HELEN GAHAGAN DOUGLAS

PRELUDE

*O God, Thou Holy God
I Call to Thee*

*Bravens
Bach*

QUARTET

O Taste and see How Gracious The Lord Is *Ralph Vaughan Williams*

OPENING WORDS

HYMN NO. 8

Bring, O morn, thy music!

TRIBUTES

Alis Di Sola

Ambassador Arthur Goldschmidt

Justice Abe Fortas

MINISTER'S PRAYER

ANTHEM

Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring

J.S. Bach

TWENTY-THIRD PSALM

CLOSING WORDS

POSTLUDE

Walter Klaus, Organist and Musical Director

F. FORRESTER CHURCH, PH.D., MINISTER • MINISTER'S STUDY LE 5-5199

A Memorial Service for

Helen Gahagan Douglas

All Souls Unitarian Church
1157 Lexington Avenue
New York

Tuesday, December 2nd 4:30 P.M.

INDEX -- Helen Gahagan Douglas, Volume IV: Congresswoman, Actress, and Opera Singer

- Acheson, Dean, 146-147, 151-152, 172, 267-268
acreage limitation, 72, 90, 120-124, 161, 171-178, 194, 281
Addams, Jane, 289
agricultural labor, 53-60, 69, 171-172, 174, 177, 276-281
Alinsky, Saul, 81-82
American Christian Palestine Committee, 151, 264-265
Anderson, Marian, 132, 137, 289
Anglin, Margaret, 258-259
Associated Farmers, 55, 74, 124, 174, 180, 183, 188
atomic energy, 140-145, 148-149
- Bamboschek, Giuseppe, 44
Barbee, Juanita Terry, 67-69, 114-117. See also Volume I, The Political Campaigns; interview with Juanita Terry Barbee, Volume II, The Congress Years; Volume III, Family, Friends, and the Theater...
Barkley, Alben W., 158
Bauer, Catherine [Wurster], 62-63
Baumgartner, John, 79, 83
Belasco, David, 42, 46-47, 251-254, 260
Bennett, Fay [Watts], 60, 277, 279-281. See also interview with Fay Bennett Watts, Volume III, Family, Friends, and the Theater...
Bhutto, Zulfikar Ali, 218-219
Bird, Remsen, 216, 222
blacks. See Negroes
Bloom, Sol, 153-154
Boddy, Manchester, 122, 180, 182, 194, 203, 210
Boke, Richard, 121
Bonstelle, Jessie, 243, 256
Bowles, Chester, 101, 162
Brady, William A., 39, 40, 43, 191, 254-258, 260
Brannan plan, 174
Bridges, Harry, 108
Bronson, Leisa, 62
Bunche, Ralph, 152
Burton, Harry Edwin, 37
- Cehanovska, Sophia, 23, 41, 43-46, 163-164, 248, 250, 254, 255, 299, 300
Cehanovsky, George, 41, 43, 46
Chambers, Frank, 185, 203
Chavoor, Evelyn, 68, 85, 88-93, 95, 96, 108, 116, 141, 158, 221. See also Volume I, The Political Campaigns; interview with Evelyn Chavoor, Volume II, The Congress Years; Volume III, Family, Friends, and the Theater...

- Chotiner, Murray, 189, 198
 civil liberties, 132-133, 164-166
 Claypool, Leslie, 122, 180
 Cohen, Lucy Kramer, 95-96, 101. See also interview with Lucy Kramer Cohen, Volume II, The Congress Years
 Common Cause. See Gardner, John
 communist issue in Congress, 135-139, 154-155. See also Un-American Activities Committee
 Connelly, Philip, 56, 78, 84-86, 160, 181
 Creel, George, 70, 202-203
 Cromwell, John, 39, 257
 crossfiling, 82-83
 Curran, Homer, 246-247
- Daly, Arnold, 256
 Daughters of the American Revolution [DAR], 132, 137
 Davis, Elmer, 197, 211
 Dean, Sir Basil, 256-257
 Democratic national conventions
 1940, 61, 70
 1948, 156
 Democratic party (California), 61
 State Central Committee, women's division, 62-63
 De Sola, Alis, 39. See also Volume II, The Congress Years; interview with Alis De Sola, Volume III, Family, Friends, and the Theater...
 Dieden, Leonard, 185, 230-231
 Dirksen, Everett, 103
 Douglas, Helen Gahagan
 childhood and youth, 3-5, 9, 11-12, 15-18, 22-23, 27-33, 44, 239-241, 244-245, 300-307, 312-315
 family
 mother (Lillian Rose Mussen), 3-5, 11-12, 16-26, 30-33, 36, 39-41, 60, 87, 166-167, 239-240, 254, 258, 300-307, 312-313
 father (Walter Gahagan II), 3-24, 30-47, 237, 276, 300-301, 312-314, 319, 321. See also Gahagan family business
 brothers (Walter Gahagan III), 5, 7, 9-17, 20-21, 44, 60, 75, 87, 223-224, 310, 315, 317; (William Corthel Gahagan), 5, 9-14, 17, 21; (Frederick Mussen Gahagan), 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 15, 224
 sister (Lillian Rose), 5, 9, 17, 20-21, 33, 51-52, 285, 300-302, 315, 320-321
 grandparents, aunts, uncles, 1-5, 9-11, 24-26, 31, 39-40
 marriage to Melvyn Douglas, 47-51, 58, 222-224, 242-243, 246
 children (Peter), 48, 88, 218, 248, 272, 311; (Mary Helen), 53, 88, 126, 218, 248, 272-273, 286, 298, 321-322; (Gregory), 48, 83, 87
 education, through high school; Barnard college, 11, 34-40, 261-301, 320

Douglas, Helen Gahagan (continued)

theatrical career

early interest in, 3, 6-7, 28-30, 33-37

on stage, 6, 39-42, 45-49, 58, 86, 237, 246-263

singer, 41-52, 57, 100, 163, 247, 254-255, 261-262, 275

film, 49, 263

political career

early interest in politics, 50, 53-61

national committeewoman, 61-65, 70-71, 82

Congress, campaigns for, 77-87; term in (1944-1950), 11, 67-70, 77-167

campaign for Senate, 1950, 186-191, 203-206, 218-228

United Nations, 146-150, 267-269

post-1950, 177, 215-218, 221-225, 229, 233-273, 276, 289-300, 323

Vermont, 310-312, 315-323

Douglas, Melvyn [Hesselberg], 43, 58-59, 71, 82, 121, 178, 185, 188, 191, 195, 197, 221-222, 224-225, 231, 243, 245, 247, 252, 276, 312-322

parents

Hesselberg, Edouard, 58, 151, 191, 246

Hesselberg, Lena Shackelford, 58, 83, 87, 151, 222, 224, 246

film career, 42, 47-50, 225, 246-248

theatrical career, 47, 49, 243, 244, 248

director, 249-250, 253

political activities, 50, 53, 57, 63, 77, 100, 123

World War II military service, 77, 140, 223

Downey, Sheridan, 70-71, 121-123, 165, 171, 173-174, 180, 182, 194, 203, 227

Edwards, India, 195, 217, 283. See also interview with India Edwards, Volume I, The Political Campaigns; Volume II, The Congress Years

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 156-158

election campaign financing, 53, 269-271

election campaigns, state and national

1932, 58

1938, 53, 123

1944, 77-87

1946, 83, 172

1948, 83, 156-162

1950, 70, 71, 82, 125, 164, 168-232. See also Nixon, Richard

1960, 271-273, 282

1962, 212

Elliott, John B., 122, 180-182

Equal Rights Amendment, 127-128

Fair Employment Practices Commission, 63, 133-134. See also Negroes

Farmers Union, 174

Farm Security Camps, 53-56, 101, 174

Ford, Lillian, 78-79

Ford, Thomas F., 72, 77, 79-81, 84, 99
 forest conservation, 117-119
 Fuller, Helen, 281-285

Gahagan family. See Douglas, Helen Gahagan
 Gahagan family business (Gahagan Engineering Corporation, Gahagan Dredging Corporation), 6-16, 92
 Gardner, John, 124, 271
 Genthe, Arnold, 177-178
 George, Grace, 257-258
 Goldschmidt, Arthur E. [Tex], 90, 91, 120, 121, 131, 286. See also interview with Arthur E. Goldschmidt, Volume II, The Congress Years
 Goldschmidt, Elizabeth Wickenden, 90-91, 131, 286. See also interview with Elizabeth Wickenden Goldschmidt, Volume II, The Congress Years
 Graham, Frank, 69, 129, 173, 276-277
 Gribble, Harry Wagstaff, 39
 Grimball, Elizabeth, 28, 39, 44

Harriman, W. Averell, 129
 Hartman, Louis, 254
 Heller, Elinor, 186
 Hewes, Laurence, 54, 57, 129, 155, 276
 Hickok, Lorena, 111, 274
 Hillman, Sidney, 78
 Hogan, Charles A., 93-94. See also interview with Charles Hogan, Volume II, The Congress Years
 Holifield, Chester [Chet], 82, 98, 137, 157-159. See also Volume I, The Political Campaigns; interview with Chester Holifield, Volume II, The Congress Years
 Hoover, Herbert, 58, 198
 housing, legislation, 69, 73, 96
 Hudgens, Robert W. [Pete], 279
 Humphrey, Hubert, 266, 269

Ickes, Harold, 74, 121, 123, 129, 137
 Independent Progressive party, 158-160
 Israel, 48, 150-153, 264

Johnson, Lyndon Baines, 90-93, 99, 120, 131, 135-136, 217, 266-267, 271-273, 296-297
 Jones, Mrs. Mattison Boyd, 70-71, 182

Kennedy, John F., 217, 227, 269, 271-273
 Keyserling, Mary Dublin, 283. See also interview with Mary Dublin Keyserling,
 Volume II, The Congress Years
 Khrushchev, Nikita, 296-298
 Kilpatrick, Vernon, 213-214
 Knowland, William, 122
 Korean War, 169

labor unions

lobbying, 108-109
 support of candidates, 56, 70, 78, 160, 181
 support of legislation, 117

LaGuardia, Fiorello, 79, 102, 268

Lamb, Robert, 141

Lange, Dorothea, 175, 177

Larson, Bird, 261

legislation

atomic energy, 140-145, 148-149
 cancer control, 125-126
 Displaced Persons Act, 191
 full employment bill, 106-107
 housing, 101-106, 127
 National Redwood Forest bill, 117-120, 182
 peacetime draft, 125
 poll tax, 132-133
 rent and price controls, 95, 101-103, 157
 tax reform, 131-132
 veterans, benefits for, 139
 war brides, 132

Lewis, John L., 56

Liebmann, Alfred, 13, 166, 302

Lilienthal, David E., 8, 175

Lilienthal, Ernest, 186

Lilienthal, Sue, 186

lobbying, 107-110

Los Angeles Times, 78, 182, 212-213

Luce, Clare Boothe, 86

Luckey, E. George, 202

Lybeck, Edward, 80, 84, 161

Lybeck, Ruth, 80, 84

Macauley, Edward Jr., 186

Macauley, Jean, 186

McCarran Act, 164-165, 204, 209

McCormack, John, 137, 165

McIntyre, Archbishop J. Francis, 184

- McMahon, Brien, 145
 McWilliams, Carey, 56
 Malone, William, 61, 63, 71, 171, 180, 203, 218, 227
 Market Basket Speech, 95, 101-103
 Marsh, Charles, 282
 Marshall Plan, 146, 153-156
 Marx, Joseph, 49, 51
 Mayer, Louis B., 53
 media
 press, 78-79, 86, 98, 140-141, 183-184, 193-194, 206, 210-213, 217, 219, 223
 television, 124, 225
 Mexican-Americans, 82
 Meyer, Eugene, 289
 Meyers, Alvin, 73, 161. See also interview with Alvin Meyers, Volume I, The Political Campaigns
 migrant labor. See agricultural labor
 Murray, Esther, 62
- National Youth Administration, 63-66
 Nazism, 264
 rise of, 49-53
 Neely, Matthew Mansfield, 125-126
 Negroes, 63, 65-70, 80-82, 113-117, 166
 "History of the Negro Soldier," 110-113
 Newman, James R., 142, 145
 Nixon, Richard M., 19, 70, 164-165, 168-169, 172, 173, 180, 182, 186-191, 193-203, 209, 214, 216, 217, 228-232, 266
 Noguchi, Isamu, sculpts head of Helen Gahagan Douglas, 178
 Norton, Mary, 130, 133
- Olson, Culbert, 53, 56, 66, 70, 71, 123
 Oppenheimer, J. Robert, 145
 Outland, George, 98
- Patman, Wright, 97, 104-105, 135
 Pauley, Edwin, 124
 Pearson, Drew, 197-198, 211
 Phillips, Gifford, 186
 Pick, Walter R., 93. See also Volume II, The Congress Years; interview with Walter R. Pick, Volume III, Family, Friends, and Theater...
 Pinchot, Gifford, 117-119, 182

- Randolph, A. Philip, 69, 276-278
 Rankin, John, 111-112, 134-1345, 137-138, 172
 Rayburn, Sam, 99, 135-136, 164
 reclamation. See acreage limitation
 Reuther, Walter, 82, 117-119, 182
 Reynolds, Florence, 67, 80, 113, 116, 169, 214
 Roosevelt, Eleanor, 57, 66, 78, 83, 111, 127-128, 180-181, 193, 198-201, 210, 273-276, 289
 Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 57, 58, 64, 72, 77, 78, 83, 99-100, 106, 143, 146, 159, 180
 Roosevelt, James, 156, 158, 188, 199-200
- Sackett, Sheldon, 182fn, 194
 Sandor, Arpad, 163
 Shumlin, Herman, 253
 Smith, Margaret Chase, 86
 Standard Oil Company, 179
 Starr, Frances, 259
 Steinbeck Committee, 54, 56
 Stevenson, Adlai, 150, 172, 195-196, 217, 227, 265-268
 Stokowski, Leopold, 64
 Straus, Michael, 121
- Taylor, Paul Schuster, 90, 97, 120, 121, 136, 175, 177, 194
 Thompson, Tommy, 57, 66
 tidelands oil issue, 98, 110, 122, 178-183
 Totheroh, Dan, 49, 59, 250
 Truman, Harry S., 98, 110, 124, 125, 146, 150, 152, 155-157, 159, 168, 172, 179, 183-184, 209-211
 Tyler, George, 44-46, 254-255, 258
- United Nations, 146-150, 267-269
 United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration [UNRRA], 157, 267-269
- United States
 Forest Service, 118
 House of Representatives
 Foreign Affairs Committee, 62, 126, 139, 152, 153
 Un-American Activities Committee [HUAC], 132, 137, 198, 204, 209, 214
 Interior, Department of, 120-121, 171. See also acreage limitation
 military aid, 146-150
- Vandenberg, Arthur H., 155
 Vermont, politics of, 307-312
 Voorhis, Jerry, 98, 100, 172, 190, 195, 217, 228
 Vorys, John, 154

- Wagner, Robert, 151, 264
Wallace, Henry, 136-138, 158-160
Warren, Earl, 72-74, 198-200
water. See acreage limitation
Watergate. See Nixon, Richard
Williams, Harrison Arlington, Jr., 278
women, individual development of, 238-239. See also Equal Rights Amendment
women in politics, 61-63, 76, 128-130, 169-170, 227
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 150, 289-300
World War II
 Civilian Defense in California, 72-73
 Japanese evacuations, 10, 74-76, 82
 Pearl Harbor, 63-64
 postwar price controls, 101-104
 postwar readjustment measures, 104-107
Works Progress Administration [WPA], 64-65, 101
Wyatt, Wilson W., 103-104
- Young, Stark, 87
- Ziffren, Paul, 186

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