

INTERVIEW #3
The 1998 Reelection Campaign
APRIL 15, 1999

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

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

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

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

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

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: Really?

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

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

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What do you think about these?

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

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

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

KOED: A big baseball fan.

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

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

KOED: It was some reference to the Klan.

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

KOED: You're vulnerable at that stage.

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

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

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

KOED: And very personalized harm.

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

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

even when you provided evidence to the contrary.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It didn't matter.

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

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

KOED: Warfare.

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

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

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

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

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

With regard to the first thing—where were we?

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

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

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

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

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

KOED: They had written off your campaign?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

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

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

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

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

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

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

[laughter]

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's my point.

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

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

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

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

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

KOED: Okay.

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

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

KOED: They certainly criticized you for that vote.

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

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

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

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

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

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: For America.

KOED: Right.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. But it never was.

KOED: I admit, that baffles me.

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

KOED: Don't ask me that!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KOED: Operation Desert Storm.

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

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

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

KOED: Yes, you did say that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

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

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

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

KOED: This is Kay Bailey Hutchison.

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

KOED: But the response became a partisan issue.

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

KOED: Because it showed that people cared enough.

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

KOED: Okay.

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

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

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

KOED: Where did the money come from?

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

KOED: Documenting such things can become quite complicated.

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

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

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

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

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

KOED: A petty cash kind of thing.

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

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

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

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

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

KOED: It gave them an opportunity—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KOED: It probably made it quicker.

[Telephone rings; interview interrupted]

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

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

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

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: No.

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

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

KOED: An extremely important question.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Duh?

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

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

KOED: Edward Brooke.

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

KOED: That would be very interesting to know.

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

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: Trepidation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KOED: It was a six-year story.

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

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

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

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

KOED: It made the papers.

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

KOED: Business people fly the Concorde regularly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: Precious little understanding. They knew more—

KOED: They read the newspapers and—

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

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

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

KOED: Higher expectations.

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

KOED: Complete segregation.

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

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: Was it that late?

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

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

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

MOSELEY BRAUN: I was married in 1973.

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

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

I've told you the colored water story?

KOED: No.

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

KOED: No.

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

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

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

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

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

I love that story.

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

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

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

KOED: She was able to pass.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[interview interrupted]

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

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

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

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

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

KOED: That's probably how they work.

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

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

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

KOED: How old was he when he died?

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

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

KOED: This was your father's mother?

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

KOED: What was your relationship with your mother?

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

to be responsible.

[interview interrupted]

MOSELEY BRAUN: Where were we?

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

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

KOED: Did your mother work?

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

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

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

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

KOED: You grew up too fast.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

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

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

KOED: Again, the symbol.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

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

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

END OF INTERVIEW #3