

ELLEN MCCONNELL BLAKEMAN
Senator Charles Percy's First Female Page, 1971
October 17, 2013

Ellen McConnell Blakeman and her friend, Sheila Sarovich, joined Kate Scott for an interview in Scott's Senate office. Blakeman brought two large scrapbooks to help narrate her experience and this interview is punctuated by turning the pages of those scrapbooks.

Scott began with the question, "How did you come to be interested in the Senate page program?"

ELLEN BLAKEMAN: My grandpa was a legislator in Springfield, Illinois. Our family made a visit and I was very interested in the pages who were working on the floor and said to myself, "That looks like a lot of fun." My family was politically-oriented, my parents were students of politics, and so that was natural. I didn't do anything about it, unlike many other pages who then instantly start stalking their representatives with letter after letter. Nothing happened until I saw this article in the local paper. Senator [Charles "Chuck"] Percy [R-IL] accepting applications for girl pages. I thought, okay, that's what I would like to do. At the time, and I'm not sure why, I obviously must have sent letters to Adlai Stevenson, who was our other senator. [Congresswoman] Charlotte Reid [R-IL]. I've got these letters in here. This is just memorabilia from what the responsibilities of pages were and what the responsibilities of the senators were. Here's the letter that I got back from Percy saying, "Here's how to apply. This is what we need from you." He also sent me this notification from the dorm, and we just drove by it, it's still there. This is the application that I submitted along with the letters of recommendation. Some time passed and this was still in the news.

KATE SCOTT: After you submitted your application, did you hear anything from him directly?

BLAKEMAN: I'd have to look at the dates of my application, December 12, I got a response in ten days saying, "You are a finalist. Call my assistant in my Chicago office and arrange for an interview." This was news about all the 10 girls who were being interviewed. I never met any of them. Here I was named one of the 10 finalists. That made news. This is my grandparents' paper. Here is Charlotte Reid saying, "I don't have a page. Maybe I will in the future." Interestingly enough, who is our friend? Kevin Conner was ultimately appointed by Charlotte Reid. After the interview, I was informed that my application had been looked upon with great favor. I should seriously think about

making a trip to Washington. In the next couple of weeks my mother and I packed for a trip that I never knew if I would make or not. The family talked endlessly, “If you go to Washington,” “What will happen when you go to Washington?” I finally said, “Stop.” It was so anxiety-producing that I finally said, “Stop talking about Washington, D.C. Just stop, stop.” While I was at school one day, Senator Percy’s office called to say that I had been selected. When I got home from school my dad had written this note and left it on the counter: “There was a call from BLEEP D.C.” [laughs] I think my brother or sister got home before I did and ran down the driveway: “There was a call from—!!”

SCOTT: Can I back up a little?

BLAKEMAN: Certainly.

SCOTT: Tell me about the interview process. What do you remember about that? That must have been incredibly intimidating.

BLAKEMAN: No, actually not. I think they wanted to see if I could speak. It was important to me to convince them that I knew how to behave. That was a big issue. Not only were the girls vulnerable, but would they go wild, which was not unheard of among the boys. I don’t remember being intimidated. I was very grateful to hear that my application had been looked on with favor. The lady was very nice. There was a press conference scheduled to announce my appointment. My dad thought it was funny that the day before my press conference, the former page Bobby Baker went to prison.

SAROVICH: So your father saves this?

BLAKEMAN: Oh yes. Oh yes, he did.

SCOTT: You mentioned that people were saying, “If you go to Washington,” or “When you go to Washington.” What did your parents think about this whole process, the fact that you were interviewing? Do you have siblings and what did they think about it?

BLAKEMAN: I have a younger brother and sister and the excitement did consume the family. My parents never expressed any reservations about going or whether this was a bad idea or good idea. We’ll get to this later, it was the era of women’s lib. It was just coming into the news. I would stress that that was not my objective at all, the interest was purely political. I know that Julie [Price] has told you the same thing, and Paulette [Desell Lund] will tell you the same thing. We just thought it would be a neat experience and we were all interested in politics.

SCOTT: Since you sent a letter of interest to the House, for you it didn't matter if it was the House or the Senate.

BLAKEMAN: No, but the correspondence is certainly much belated [with the House] after my initial interest. Why my parents didn't say, "Ellen, if you are really interested in this, why don't you start writing some letters?" That would have been like them, but I don't recall that. We have a press conference and there the pictures are taken. There are my parents. For some reason they thought it would be appropriate for me to pour him a cup of coffee. I went along with it, I don't know why.

SCOTT: Well, you are how old—17?

BLAKEMAN: I think I'm 16 at that point.

SCOTT: We should really get this on tape. When were you born?

BLAKEMAN: Nineteen-fifty-four. I was 16 and the summer before my senior year I turned 17. There will be some correspondence from the staff and Percy saying that they had a birthday party for me.

SCOTT: This is the first time that you met Senator Percy, wasn't it?

BLAKEMAN: Yes.

SCOTT: Tell me about that, what was that like?

BLAKEMAN: I don't remember, only to tell you that my parents were not Percy Republicans. They were Republicans, but they were not hugely enamored of him. They weren't donors.

SCOTT: Why not?

BLAKEMAN: I think they were more Goldwater Republicans. He was more moderate and they were more conservative. Percy was not a name that we idolized in my house. After the press conference we went to be on [the Irv Kupcincet] "Kup Show." Here's me on TV. While we were there—

SCOTT: I don't know what the "Kup Show" is.

BLAKEMAN: It was an iconic Chicago talk show on an iconic Chicago station. He also had a gossip column. I may have some clippings from his gossip column. While we were there—Percy was very media savvy and very telegenic, as you can see—while we were there he took this note. It was the instruction to ask his assistant to bring the car around for him and his wife to leave. He wrote the note. I had never been on TV before. He wrote the note and tossed it on the floor for one of the aides or production people to retrieve because he couldn't hand it to somebody while he was on the air. I was so interested in that little bit of TV savvy. It's hard to read his writing, so that's what the note says.

Here is all the publicity of that day. There is a certain sameness about it.

SCOTT: Well, you look pretty excited. Tell me about what it felt like!

BLAKEMAN: It was a big deal. I don't remember being nervous or flustered. It was just, "Okay, sit here." Amazingly, in retrospect, the staff for this entire time, the staff never sat down with me to rehearse for an interview. There were tons. I remember sitting in the press secretary's office when I arrived in Washington and she was talking to reporters from the *Tribune* and others and she just handed the phone to me. Or maybe we were on two lines and at one point one of the reporters said, "What do you look like?" [laughs] Like I'm supposed to—

SCOTT: Self describe.

BLAKEMAN: Then the press secretary stepped in and said, "Let me answer that." She became the person under whose wing I went. I was interested in PR and stuff, so that was natural.

These are all the mastheads.

SCOTT: Let's talk about the dates here. This is January 17. I know that there was a hearing, an ad-hoc committee hearing.

BLAKEMAN: Much later. We'll get to that.

SCOTT: At this point Percy thinks you are going to be a female page, and you think that. Were you aware at this point that the Senate was putting the brakes on a bit?

BLAKEMAN: No. I'll answer your question. There is a letter in here that says something like, the chance of you not being sworn in is, albeit, slim. Something like that.

Later, Percy admitted that his strategy was confrontation, to march me down to [Senate Sergeant at Arms] Robert Dunphy's office to say here she is with the credentials from Mark Trice, and swear her in.

SCOTT: "Are you really going to say no?"

BLAKEMAN: What they reasoned was that there is no rule explicitly prohibiting girls, so in the absence of that, what's the problem?

Then the delays began. "Ellen vows to fight Senate." That's a little over[stated]. "Senate rebuff."

SCOTT: Now are these mainly from local papers? *The Daily News*, that's a local paper?

BLAKEMAN: Chicago, *Chicago Today*, *Washington Post*. There is quite a range. Here is Kup. Some of them are kind of indignant.

SCOTT: Do you remember much about the interview with him? What is was like to be on TV?

BLAKEMAN: I do remember one thing. Percy kind of sandbagged me. He was first to speak. "I have chosen her. We believe she is well-qualified," and then marched down my qualifications. "She's a good student. She's an athlete. She's in 4-H." All this kind of stuff. And then Kup turned to me and wanted to know about my experience. There's nothing to be said! [All laugh] He said it all! I think that's the only time that I was flustered in a media encounter. There was literally nothing to say.

SAROVICH: He said it all!

BLAKEMAN: Yes! Anyway, here are some more editorials.

SCOTT: Let me take that as a way to talk about what kind of student you were then, as a high schooler. What kind of 4-H were you in?

BLAKEMAN: I was an "A" student and I was in a 4-H Home "Ec" [Economics] club. We did sewing and cooking. I took quite an interest in sewing and made my clothes. That was a nice outlet. I enjoyed being a competitive swimmer. I swam for the Y back in the day. At the time, the only opportunity for a girl to be in a sport was to be a cheerleader. I wanted to be athletic so we swam for the Y. That was fun. Student council.

I think Percy was quite shrewd because if you went down a list of what you want your page to be, he could check a lot of those boxes. My recommendations, I had the swim coach, the high school counselor, the minister, the people that you need. I don't remember thinking about that strategically.

SCOTT: You were 16! You weren't thinking too much about it, right?

BLAKEMAN: Anyway, we went to Washington and got turned away.

SCOTT: Did your parents come with you on this trip?

BLAKEMAN: The whole family came and dropped me off, to get me situated and moved into the dorm. We probably did some sightseeing. I'm sure we did some sightseeing. My parents and I—my brother and sister didn't go to Dunphy's office but my parents did—so there were three of us from the McConnell family who were stunned. Even the aide seemed surprised.

SCOTT: Did you speak to Dunphy yourself then? He came out to talk to you?

BLAKEMAN: Oh yes. I shook his hand.

SCOTT: He was the one who delivered the message—

BLAKEMAN: "I cannot, will not, swear you in."

SCOTT: What kind of reasons was he giving at the time?

BLAKEMAN: He was unwilling to—he came up with those reasons later. Basically he was unwilling to break a precedent himself without direction from the Senate. Then later he said, "We don't have the facilities. The work is too hard."

SCOTT: "There's crime in the city. How will they get back and forth [to and from the dorm]?"

BLAKEMAN: From Dunphy's office we went back to Percy's office. The staff said, "We are going to get this resolved in a matter of days. Stay here." I had moved in, so that made a lot of sense.

SCOTT: You moved in to the dorm anyway?

BLAKEMAN: Oh yes, oh yes, I had already moved in. Then some editorials. This all caught me off guard. Women would write to me saying, “We are so proud that you are doing this on behalf of women.” I thought, I’m not.

SCOTT: You really didn’t feel that way?

BLAKEMAN: No, not at all.

Paulette was nominated before I was. You could check Julie’s memoirs. I think that she was also nominated before I was. I was the first one turned away. There is a news article in which [Jacob] Javits’ [R-NY] staff said “We didn’t want to humiliate her [Paulette].” [Fred] Harris [R-OK] saying something along the same line about Julie.

SCOTT: That it was bad form for you to show up and then be turned away.

BLAKEMAN: Yes. Percy’s office said, “We were the first to be turned away.” [“First turned away” must have been misunderstood as “first” by the press.] Paulette took a little exception to that. She [wrote a letter to the editor stating], “Your column stating that Ellen McConnell is the first girl page. She is not, I am.” I saved that.

At one point, and this is that letter, which will perplex you, probably. At one point, someone discovered that according to the Senate rules, as a minor employee I was entitled to go to school. Percy solicited this letter confirming that I was a legitimate Senate employee and a minor, but Dunphy wouldn’t budge on [the school issue].

One of the side shows, the Rules Committee was talking about this. They spent as much time talking about what we would wear, as whether we would serve. I wasn’t aware of it at the time. I don’t know if Percy’s office was and they just didn’t tell me. Apparently at one point there was a fashion show of possible uniforms.

SCOTT: Of possible uniforms for the girl pages?

BLAKEMAN: Yes. That’s that article right there.

SCOTT: I wasn’t aware of that. I knew that there was discussion of what would they wear. I knew that there was great concern over where would they stay and how would they be more or less escorted—

BLAKEMAN: Supervised.

SCOTT: Supervised, and also this issue about their stamina. Would girls have the stamina required? Percy says in the hearing, he says something like, “I haven’t seen pages carrying more than a couple *Congressional Records*. This is a non-issue.”

BLAKEMAN: Or a breath mint, I think was his quote.

SCOTT: He backs up what you’ve said. The only real issue that he can see is that this is about tradition. We haven’t done this before and the Senate always loves and embraces its tradition so that’s why we’re not doing this.

BLAKEMAN: As a side note, I think it’s interesting that you have two Republicans championing this, and Fred Harris of course, from Oklahoma. Javits and Percy were the water bearers on this.

You can read this, the headlines really tell. Still waiting, still waiting. I had been here more than one month at this point.

SCOTT: Were you attending the school at this point?

BLAKEMAN: Oh no.

SCOTT: Were you on his staff, doing work in his office?

BLAKEMAN: I don’t remember when he put me on the payroll, when we realized it was probably going to be more than a few days. He said I will put you on my payroll as a clerk at the page salary. I went to his office and typed, filed, I was the designated messenger, of course. I would run errands around Capitol Hill. No, I wasn’t going to school. Some of these articles will say that I’m doing independent study. I don’t remember doing that.

SCOTT: Were your parents concerned with this institutional logjam? Were they wondering if they had left you here and you were never going to get in? Was there any talk with them, “Should we come back and get you? What do you want to do?”

BLAKEMAN: Yes, there was. It became more difficult as time went on. I don’t think they were ever fearful for my well-being, but I did reach the expiration date. Now let’s see, April 21. I don’t remember exactly when I came home. “Ellen faces deadline.” Okay, at a certain point at the end of February, my parents said, “You’ve got to come home.” Here I am back in school in March, they thought that I may never get back to Washington. That was very hard. I had missed a lot of school, as you can tell by the

dates. That was very daunting. While I was here I had expected any day I would go to school. One of my subjects was Spanish, so I would enlist one of the boy pages to bring me the Spanish homework. I said in the [C-SPAN show] that it was kind of like Deep Throat. We would meet in a Senate corridor and he would hand me Don Quixote, or something like that, and I would do my best to keep up. You know, I wasn't doing math, I wasn't doing science.

SCOTT: Tell me a little bit about a typical day for you at this point, before you start the page program. How much interaction did you have with the other members of Percy's staff, and then with the pages?

BLAKEMAN: Oh, a lot with Percy's staff! No interaction with pages except for this one homework page. But Percy's staff, as I also said in the [C-SPAN show], I was one of the few, maybe only, pages who ever worked in their sponsor's office [before or during the page experience] and became very close to the staff members. [Many more pages ultimately work for their sponsors after being pages, often as collegians, I believe.] In fact, there are some pictures here. You'll see a picture of me out camping. Well, Percy's executive secretary [Nadine Jacobsen] lived somewhere in Virginia or Maryland. She and her husband, I spent the weekend with them a couple times. We went out to their land or lot or something and made a fire and cooked. [Nadine was originally Percy's secretary at Bell & Howell, and followed him to D.C. She could absolutely make his signature. She told me a story about her first day at Bell & Howell, and Percy signing his name several times on a scratch pad, and tossing it over to her and saying, "Learn how to do this." "So I learned it," she said.]

SCOTT: I'm sure that they were very sorry for the delay, but also that they felt very responsible for your well-being.

BLAKEMAN: Yes. Nadine and her husband were very nice. I wouldn't have anything to do on the weekend except be in the dorm. Other than that, I worked in the office. It was fun. That was a big part of my education, too. There are things about the workings of a senator's office that you don't know until you are there.

SCOTT: What types of things do you remember learning?

BLAKEMAN: The one thing that is most prominent is the case workers. When someone says write to your senator, well, he has six people—I think it was six—on staff to help people navigate social security, veterans benefits, Medicaid, all that stuff. These people would get on the phone and talk to the senior people at social security. That was an eye-opener. The other advisors, he had the foreign affairs advisor, he had the domestic

affairs advisor, the press secretary, all the aides, the guy who opened the mail and sorted—okay, you get robo letter a, you get robo letter b. Who knew? Who knew?

[Looking at the ad-hoc committee report] I've got the testimony from all three senators. Unfortunately, Harris wasn't there. I don't think Julie was there. Paulette and I were there.

SCOTT: She told me that she wasn't at the hearing.

BLAKEMAN: Okay, here is the report. If you pull this out, and I did this during the C-SPAN thing [paper rustling].

SCOTT: Right, I love these old maps. This is the crime map.

BLAKEMAN: This is where all the pages lived and where all the crimes were. That was appended to this report.

SCOTT: I can remember that Percy made the point in his testimony: "Somebody was just killed in a monastery. There are crimes happening all over the place. It's happening all over Chicago."

Did you grow up in Chicago?

BLAKEMAN: Northwest suburbs.

SCOTT: Northwest suburbs. Where specifically?

BLAKEMAN: Dundee, which is halfway between Chicago and Rockford [paper rustling].

We have the hearing and then the report is issued and then nothing happens. You would think something would happen. I say that naively knowing what ultimately was going to have to happen.

SCOTT: Who is saving all the clippings for you, by the way, at the time? Your parents?

BLAKEMAN: My mom and me. We're still going on. [Reading headlines:] "Puts off. Shuns. Lib lagging. All but give up." I don't remember that exactly. All three of us are in limbo.

SCOTT: You met Paulette at the hearing? Or maybe earlier?

BLAKEMAN: We had phone called a few times, but never face to face. She was still in her high school in Alexandria.

SCOTT: Right, she lived here in Washington, that's what I remember.

BLAKEMAN: At one point there was a TV feature on us. I don't know, they had footage of me marching up to the Senate office building and Paulette playing the flute in her band. It was pretty cute.

Now here is something, Percy signed this clipping. "Opposed by Byrd," I guess that would be Robert Byrd [D-WV], who was the whip.

You look at these headlines and read whatever articles you want.

This was cute—

SCOTT: "First page girl goes home."

BLAKEMAN: I know, that was so sad. Will Ellen ever set foot on the floor?

SCOTT: Was that your sense of it, too, going home? I might not be back.

BLAKEMAN: Yes, even though the hearing had been held. They still had to vote on it and there was, I think—a lot of their attitude was ignore it or delay it until it goes away! You'll see a clipping of a hopeful girl page, many years my senior, who went through the process and was rebuffed. She came and interviewed the three of us, reliving memories. "I tried, I didn't make it. You guys did."

You'll read this as kind of amusing, a memo from Percy's press secretary saying the strategy to get you to be a page before you are 65!

SCOTT: What was the reception? How were you received by folks on his staff and other people in the institution? If they saw you walking, running a message for him or taking something around for him, did people stop you? I know that happens later on. Did they do that with you at this point? You would have been so unusual in the institution at that point. Everybody must have known who you were.

BLAKEMAN: I don't think so. I would not have been dressed in page attire, just business office attire. I don't recall ever being stopped. Later when we are in the uniform, I was stopped.

Legislation, Percy submitted a resolution, which I should have realized at the time that the committee wasn't going to act without legislation. This took a long time to introduce. Part and parcel with news about Washington, there were these photos about pages in the Wisconsin general assembly, and what they were wearing. I thought it was kind of cute.

[Reading articles:] "Fight, fight, fight." This must be his press release—"has joined in sponsoring a resolution." I don't remember what this press conference was exactly. Somehow all three of us came to Washington and we are at a press conference where we talked. The three of us were asked questions. Julie, I don't remember this, but Julie says that she became tongue-tied and Paulette Desell became tongue-tied and I stepped right up and said something, which embarrasses me, but I probably did. This may have been the first time that I actually met Julie. This is the AP report saying, "The Rules Committee sanctioned today the appointment of girl pages." That's kind of cool.

SAROVICH: What is the date on that?

BLAKEMAN: It doesn't have a date. Someone must have clipped it and sent it to me, maybe Percy's staff.

Back in the day, in the hallway behind the Senate floor, we had news tickers [AP, UPI]. One of our duties was to check the tickers every once in a while and pin them up on a cork board of some kind. Of course, now they don't have tickers any more.

They vote. I don't know if these are exact, but the ad hoc subcommittee voted first and then it went to the Rules Committee and then it went to the Senate floor.

SCOTT: There's an article that says it will be okay if they wear pants. This issue is finally resolved.

BLAKEMAN: Well, you are more conversant. It's a voice vote. I said in C-SPAN that I wish I had been on the floor because the pages always voted too. If there was a voice vote, we always voted. Sometimes the presiding officer would look over at us—where did that noise come from? I'm sure the pages voted on this, too! Then the swearing-in. Here is the recording made at the swearing-in. I don't have the recording but I have the memo that goes with it.

SCOTT: Let's talk about the swearing-in. What was that like after all this time? You had gone back to Illinois, and then you came back?

BLAKEMAN: I came back for this. I believe only a week elapsed from the Senate floor vote to when we were actually sworn in. Julie was still in Oklahoma. Paulette was local. I came in. We went to Javits' office and did this.

SCOTT: There is that photo. I have a little different photo here.

BLAKEMAN: Same photo, it's just cropped differently. This guy was from Dunphy's office. Dunphy didn't come and do it. I don't know if that was sending a message, or what.

SCOTT: The photo is in Javits' office?

BLAKEMAN: Yes, and after the fact someone reported to me that there was maybe a little dust-up, that Javits had misled me and where the swearing-in was going to be thinking that it would be a sabotage so I wouldn't be there and it would just be Paulette. I don't remember that at all. If you ever ask Paulette about it, hopefully that's not true. I can't believe Javits would do that.

SCOTT: I had heard a story, or maybe I read a news account, that the two of you were here on the same day, May 14, and Julie came and was sworn in the following Monday. The three of you were here at the same time. But there was something about that first day, something about someone going to the Disbursing Office versus someone going right down to the floor, so technically one person was on the books before the other one. This is what the media wanted to report on, who was the first page?

BLAKEMAN: I can tell you exactly what happened. After we were sworn in, Paulette, accompanied by Javits, went to the floor and was the first girl to step foot on the floor. That weekend, Percy had a group of Illinois Republicans in town and they were going to the White House. I knew that I had to go back to school to finish the last two weeks of my junior year. He did not take me to the floor. I did not go to the Disbursing Office. I went to the White House. All these Republicans and my family (my parents, and brother and sister) got on the bus, went to the White House and went to the Rose Garden. Because of what had just happened, all the people kind of pushed us [my family and me] to the front.

SCOTT: This is the same day you were sworn in. Then you end up in the Rose Garden at the White House.

BLAKEMAN: Here we are. I got pushed to the front. I have a better photo in the back.

SCOTT: And there's President Nixon!

BLAKEMAN: I think this must be some other Republicans. There is my brother and there's my sister. That is my mom and my dad. Do you think that this was our Christmas card!? [laughs] If you do, you're right.

SCOTT: Were your parents Nixon supporters? Or was he too moderate for them?

BLAKEMAN: Yes, they were Nixon supporters.

SCOTT: In other words, that was quite an experience for everyone.

BLAKEMAN: Yes, and the Watergate break-in didn't occur until almost a year later. Although in retrospect we knew that high-jinx were in the works.

SCOTT: Did you meet the president? Were you formally introduced to him?

BLAKEMAN: I don't remember if I shook his hand or not.

SCOTT: Were you awe-struck? Impressed by this? Or does nothing impress you at 16?

BLAKEMAN: I thought it was a pretty big deal. Yes, I thought it was a pretty big deal.

SCOTT: First girl page and in the same day down to the White House.

BLAKEMAN: Yes, yes. I am not wearing the official uniform. I'm wearing something that I made and thought it would be appropriate.

These reports are about Paulette's first few minutes on the floor and they are a little snarky. "Nervous on her first day." "Talks, misses first cue." She sat down and someone snapped and she was [talking] so that's the gist of the story. I love her dearly.

This is a shrunk down photo that the swearing-in guy signed and Percy also signed it. That was pretty cool.

How are we doing on time?

SCOTT: I have as much time as you'd like to give me. It's really up to you. I'm delighted that you are here.

BLAKEMAN: Fine. If you don't mind, if I leave this with you then you'll have time to look at the articles and see if the headlines intrigue you.

SCOTT: I think there will be several newspaper articles here and some photos that we'll like to make copies of just for our records.

BLAKEMAN: Okay, during, there continued to be stories, "Senate girl pages understand women's lib now."

SCOTT: I have read quite a few of those types of articles and it made me wonder—you are suggesting, and you are not the first one to suggest to me, that you did not feel that you were part of the larger women's lib movement. But then I've also had a couple people say that they ran into stuff within the institution that made them just think a little bit about those issues.

BLAKEMAN: You have characterized it correctly. It was an eye-opener. Once I was on the job, I never felt second-class or discriminated against. But it did put the bigger issue into perspective. A lot of time passed here, too. From the time it started in January 1971 to the time that I finally went home, January 1972, the women's liberation movement changed a lot of things. You can't be immune to it. But we were never interested in being enlisted as spear carriers. I guess that's the way—

Okay, things are going great, the boys treat us great. Here's the article, you can take it out or not, and unfold it, about the girl who tried to be a page and couldn't. She interviewed all three of us. It was kind of a cute article, poignant, very poignant.

SCOTT: What was a typical day like for you once your page assignment officially started? What do you remember about it?

BLAKEMAN: We started during the summer, of course, when there wasn't school. We'd report. There were duties on the floor. We would have to set up everybody's desk and the documents had to be set in a specific order, in the order that the

legislation would be considered. On the bottom, I believe, was the *Congressional Record* from the day before, and then there would be the bills, the hearings, the reports, all of the pertinent paperwork. That would be organized by a page, a floor boy. There were certain pages who were promoted to this position of some responsibility, where the night before they would listen to Senator Byrd say, "By unanimous consent this is what we'll do. The debate will be limited to 30 minutes equally divided." The floor boys would take notes and then give us instructions the next day about how the desks were to be set up. That was given. Then the session would start and we would sit on the steps just like they do now, I think, and move up in the queue. The first page would answer the next snap or the next trip, or whatever. Then you come back and get to the end and work your way up.

SCOTT: You were also attending page school? Not during the summer.

BLAKEMAN: Not during the summer. It must have been during the 4th of July weekend, I came home and I appeared on a TV show. I celebrated a birthday. Here is the calendar from my birthday. The high school wanted me to be the honorary homecoming queen. They wanted Percy to come and he writes back and says, thanks, but I can't. During this time I was in *Seventeen*.

SCOTT: You were profiled in *Seventeen* magazine?

BLAKEMAN: Yes.

SCOTT: Now, you are acting like all of this is no big deal!

SAROVICH: She is always like this.

SCOTT: Can you try to give me a sense for what you felt at the time about doing interviews like that? What was going through your mind at the time about this experience and this high profile?

BLAKEMAN: I thought the opportunity was pretty neat.

Where did that other *Seventeen* article go? I remember being pretty nonplussed by it. I was never supervised on an interview. I think for maybe this *Seventeen* interview that is coming up the reporter (I don't remember if it was a girl or a guy) met me at the dorm and I said, "Let's walk over to the fountains and sit and talk." That's what we did. Again, I find it a little bit amazing that I was never given any spokesperson training. Or, "watch out for this question." We are so sensitive to that now. Now the pages aren't allowed to give interviews at all.

SCOTT: What was your dorm like? What was it like to live in the dorm?

BLAKEMAN: It was nice. I had a room by myself and a bathroom down the hall shared with other girls, and a cafeteria that served a couple meals. When I worked late I could call the dorm and say, "Set aside a plate for me," so when I got home it would be there."

SCOTT: That's nice. The other women, what kinds of work were they doing?
[They worked] predominantly on the Hill?

BLAKEMAN: A lot of FBI secretaries because that was J. Edgar Hoover's rule, they had to live in approved housing for a period of time until they were given permission to get an apartment.

SCOTT: Maybe until they were married?

BLAKEMAN: That could be, but that was the rule. There were other young ladies who worked on the Hill. Most of them were older than me, I was just in high school. Most of them were older than me. I made some very good friends. This was also a time, one of my friends was an FBI secretary, this was a time when Hoover's rule was that the supervisor had to record how many times the secretary wore pants to work. I can't make this up!

SCOTT: You wouldn't even imagine something like that could be possible.

BLAKEMAN: It was.

SCOTT: How did you get your page uniform?

BLAKEMAN: I made it. They said a black or navy blue pants suit and a white shirt. So I made a couple.

SCOTT: Did you bring your sewing machine here?

BLAKEMAN: I must have made them in that short period of time between swearing-in and actually starting to work. Polyester, as was the fashion.

SCOTT: What kind of shoes?

BLAKEMAN: Flat shoes.

SCOTT: Black, I imagine.

BLAKEMAN: Or blue, something like that.

Much to my surprise, during the summer, it was jackets off. I had made some elastic band pants, which you never really wear without a jacket on. I was horrified to discover it was jackets off. I have some pictures of those beauties. During the winter, at some point Julie went home and Senator [Daniel] Inouye [D-HI] appointed Mari [Iwashita] and I don't know who appointed Barb [Wheeler], but this is—

SCOTT: It was Senator Harris.

BLAKEMAN: Oh, okay, replaced Julie. Then Julie came back.

SCOTT: Julie came back the next year.

BLAKEMAN: Julie came back. Okay, here is the other *Seventeen*. So [for this photo] they hauled us out on the steps and it was pretty cold, I remember. They took our picture and then it was everywhere. Someone called me and said, “What’s it like?”

SCOTT: Tell me about your impressions of the members. You are 16 and some of these members are very well known, on television or otherwise. A lot of people mention Senator [Edward] Kennedy [D-MA], for example, because he had presidential ambitions and he was from the Kennedy family. That sticks in a lot of people’s minds. Were there individuals who you were greatly impressed by?

BLAKEMAN: Yes, certainly our sponsoring senators we held in very high esteem. I remember [George] McGovern [D-SD] and [Mark] Hatfield [R-OR] because of the McGovern-Hatfield Vietnam amendment. I believe Bob Dole [R-KS] may have been a freshman. I remember him seated at the back, on the end. [Majority Leader] Mike Mansfield [D-MT], I don't really remember too many of the Democrats. I do remember at one point Kennedy was presiding and one of us had to go up to him and say, “Eunice Shriver is in the gallery.” He said something like, “What am I going to do with her.” [Scott laughs]

SCOTT: Would that kind of stuff be passed among the pages?

BLAKEMAN: Well, we could all hear it! Strom Thurmond [R-SC] sat right in the front. I have a funny story to tell about him. He used to appoint pages for 60 days, so there would be a constant turnover of pages. They all seemed to be sons of newspaper editors. How South Carolina can have that many papers boggles my mind. But that was my impression. Strom would get up, he was in the front row, and he would often go down the row. “Whose page are you?” Whose page are you? Whose page are you?” You’d say, “Percy,” “Javits,” “Weicker,” stuff like that. One day he got to his own page, “And whose page are you?” The kid said, “I’m your page, sir.” He said, “Of course you are, son.” It was priceless.

Watching Senator Byrd act was unbelievable. Mike Mansfield was always a command presence. One of the appointments that we considered was Earl Butz, the secretary of agriculture, and the Senate was balking. Mansfield said, “Let’s get a move on here or the papers are going to write, ‘Senate sits on Butz.’” [All laugh] There was a procedural issue for the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] and I don’t remember what it was, but again, the Senate was balking. He begged, he said, “Please, please act on this. Get the ladies off my back!” [All laugh] Little stuff like that. Senator [John] Tower [R-TX] always had a [breath freshening spray]. He was always spraying. [Robert] Packwood [R-OR] met an unfortunate demise, but he was very nice, friendly to the pages. He would always say “hi” when we ran into each other in the hall. This was—I never regarded it as flirtatious, but friendly—he would say, “What are you doing this weekend?” “I’m going on a picnic.” “Okay, have fun!” That sort of thing. He was nice. Hatfield was always extremely well dressed, which I noticed because I was into sewing. I would notice the men’s suits which were impeccably tailored. Edward Brooke [R-MA] was a senator then. He was quite impressive, also very dapper. I don’t remember any that regarded, well, there were a couple that we regarded as dim bulbs. Their names will go unmentioned. The young people had an acute sense of who was a good legislator and who was not. I think in a lot of things, when you are talking about the high school basketball team or the U.S. Senate, you can’t fool the kids. The kids know. Julie has remarked on that previously, too.

SCOTT: There were standouts.

BLAKEMAN: Yes, and some who would always say the dumbest things, the dumbest things. And some who had issues that they just wouldn’t let go. Here you are talking about Rhodesia again—that’s when it was called Rhodesia.

SCOTT: You mentioned the McGovern-Hatfield amendment. That is so much a part of this era, that ongoing debate over Vietnam, and the protests are still all over the Capitol. Were you thinking about those types of things? Were you political in the sense

that you were developing a political consciousness about where you stood on these issues? Or were you just taking it all in?

BLAKEMAN: We were doing more than taking it in. My observation was that most pages adopted the positions of either their sponsor or certainly their party. Now in my case, Percy was a moderate Republican and an early opponent of the Vietnam War so that was an easy position to take. A couple other pieces of legislation that I remember were the Lockheed Aircraft loan. That was fiercely partisan, with the Republicans in favor, which is funny to reflect now, as I said in the C-SPAN interview, how times have changed. The Republicans were all in favor of that business stimulus, but now, TARP—forget it! Detroit—forget it! Then conversely, the campaign check-off law, \$3 from your [tax return]—and that was also fiercely partisan. Again, how times have changed. The candidates won't even take the money. But at the time the Democrats needed the money and the Republicans didn't. I don't remember specifically my opinion about that. We also had two Supreme Court nominees, [William] Rehnquist and [Lewis] Powell. Earl Butz was confirmed. Of course, this was before Bork, so the Supreme Court, that was—

SCOTT: They treated the nominations differently.

BLAKEMAN: This was cool. I got named a floor boy.

SAROVICH: Did they change it to floor girl, or no?

SCOTT: Did they at least alter the title?

BLAKEMAN: Yes, they changed it to floor assistant. That was pretty cool.

SCOTT: Tell me how that changed your life. What else were you doing then? You were the person listening to Byrd give the run down.

BLAKEMAN: Yes, and the next day saying here's the order that the stuff goes in. It was pretty cool, very cool. It was a nice honor that not everybody got, being singled out by the people in the cloakroom. Then—talk about opportunist—my representative Bob McClory called me in and wanted me to pose in this picture with his nominating petitions. I really felt like I had been used. I didn't know if I was even going to vote for him. [Scott laughs] I'm in this picture so that he can write my name in the caption and it goes in the Dundee paper. Oh well.

SCOTT: This paper is December of 1971, so you are in school, you are in Page School. What was that like? Tell me a little about that.

BLAKEMAN: It was not very challenging. As a senior, I only had to take two classes, so that's all I took, English and economics, which was required by my high school. Where the other young people were taking math and science and in some cases languages, I was spared that. It was a pretty easy time.

Here's a telegram that I got from Percy about my grades. They would share our grades. He gets it wrong, he said two As and a B. Well I only took two classes. I did get a B in economics, I have to say. The hours were long, but because of what was going on, as you alluded to with the Vietnam War, the Senate hours were very long and we were reporting very early so we might have—we started school at 6:15, we got out at 8:15, we might have 15-minute classes because they couldn't lop our breakfast half hour. You don't accomplish much in a classroom in 15 minutes.

SCOTT: Did you have homework regularly?

BLAKEMAN: I think we had homework. I don't know how the teachers did that. It just wasn't very hard. The teachers, the school was poorly managed and poorly staffed. Even though being a page teacher was supposed to be such a feather in your cap, because it was prestigious, the hours weren't long. I think my economics teacher was pretty good. My English teacher was hopeless.

SCOTT: Were you at this time, since it's your senior year, thinking about college as well?

BLAKEMAN: Oh yes. Sheila and I both went to the University of Illinois. With the early application and acceptance procedure, I applied and by Thanksgiving I knew I was going. So while the other pages were sweating over their applications to Yale and Harvard, and stuff like that, that was a non-issue. It was a big relief.

SCOTT: I'll bet. That's not something that you would have wanted to consider, with the long hours that you had to maintain and the mediocrity of the Page School—

BLAKEMAN: They are writing essays and filling out applications. They are all going to East Coast schools. Many could never understand why I wanted to go to U of I. "Why don't you go to Smith or someplace like that?" Well, they've got a college of communications there [at Illinois], it's three hours away, what's not to like?

SCOTT: It's an excellent school, I don't know that it had the same reputation then, but today it's an excellent school.

SAROVICH: Probably not as much, but liberal arts, you went into liberal arts or communications, that was good. That was very good back then.

BLAKEMAN: Liberal arts, yes.

That's the funny line from the movie "Risky Business": "Here I come, U of I!" When he thinks he's going to be turned down for Princeton.

SCOTT: Let's back up. You said you already knew that's what you wanted to do. Does the Senate experience just further strengthen that conviction? Did you come in knowing that's what you wanted to do? Did you learn more about it while you were here?

BLAKEMAN: I learned more about it. Certainly, I was very impressed by the job that the press secretary had. That opened up a whole new thought process, but it was still baseline communications. Originally I thought that maybe I would marry it to home ec, sewing or something like that, but that certainly broadened the options. That was a good experience.

At one point, a journalist must have submitted a manuscript to Robert Dunphy. He wrote down, "copy for Ellen McConnell" and must have sent it down to the cloakroom, which I thought was kind of weird. The final thing that I did was the State of the Union in January '72, that was the last big thing and that was pretty cool. Here's the photo and all the pages hung out on the banister back there. From the Republican newsletter, I saved the whole thing because I thought it was interesting to consider the legislation that was being considered at the time, the draft. The year in pictures.

SAROVICH: I didn't know this! You hid this one from me.

BLAKEMAN: I forgot I had it. I'll tell you something hugely embarrassing about that picture. Percy always wanted to do this [motions with both hand over head in v shape]. He did it with me several times. I must have been—I don't know why I was wearing this dress. It's not a page uniform. But you can see how short it is. He wanted to lift my hands and I didn't know how to say no.

SCOTT: It looks all right.

BLAKEMAN: It doesn't look as bad as I thought at the time. I just didn't know what to do.

SCOTT: That's back in the era where someone couldn't show you the picture instantly, either, so you couldn't know what it was ultimately going to look like.

BLAKEMAN: That's true. Here is some—Billie Jean King, other women, in the year in pictures.

SCOTT: That's really remarkable. This is *Life* [Magazine] and here's a photo of you with others, "A flock of first ladies, and maybe Ms. President." Billie Jean. That's a big deal.

BLAKEMAN: If you want to pull this out, we folded up the caption. A lot of these pages are folded. I forgot about that.

SCOTT: When I talked to Julie, I don't know that she had as much interaction with her sponsor as you did. It sounds like you met with [Senator Percy] several times.

BLAKEMAN: I'll tell you something unbelievable, a couple things unbelievable. I spent the night at his house a couple times.

SCOTT: Did you really? For what reason? Here in Washington?

BLAKEMAN: Yes, he had a house in Georgetown and once I went over and had dinner with his daughter, Gayle, and Senator Percy.

SCOTT: She was just your age, wasn't she?

BLAKEMAN: She was maybe a year or two older, and one of her girlfriends and then we went out to the movies, to see "Women in Love," if you can imagine. Then we came back and slept at the house. Another time Percy invited me over. I don't know if it was to have been a trip to Wolf Trap Farm, or something like that, but the Senate was late. That got scuttled, but he said, well, you were going to spend the night anyway, let's go. We went over and he put me in Gayle's room and the next morning we got up and had a swim and went to work. Can you imagine that happening in this day and age? I'm sure Lorraine was not around. I don't remember if I ever met her, maybe at a Christmas party.

SCOTT: Would you be in his car? Did he have a driver? Did he drive himself?

BLAKEMAN: He drove himself, and very fast!

SCOTT: You would ride with him?

BLAKEMAN: Yes! He didn't have a driver. He had a Maserati, or something like that. It was a pretty fancy car.

SCOTT: How often do you talk to your parents at this point? Do you catch up with them once a week or something?

BLAKEMAN: Probably. The Percy people, because I had worked in their office, I had a key. I could come in on the weekends and use the WATS line.¹ Is that dated or what? Of course, I didn't have a phone number at the dorm but I had a phone and there was a switchboard. They would switch calls in.

SCOTT: How often did you go home? For the holidays, I imagine.

BLAKEMAN: Fourth of July, probably. August break. Thanksgiving, I'm sure I went home for Thanksgiving. Christmas, whenever there was a recess. Not other occasions. If they were working, we were working.

There's a picture of the pages. Here I'm not wearing the official page uniform. I'm not sure how I got away with that. There's Paulette, and Michael Johnson, who is now an official.

SCOTT: He's an assistant to the sergeant at arms, I believe.

BLAKEMAN: That's sounds right. This was Kennedy's page. Other names that you won't, this was the Deep Throat page [Scott laughs], Tommy Gonzalez. There's Mari Iwashita.

Here's a funny thing that they wrote up for my birthday.

SCOTT: The pages?

BLAKEMAN: No, Percy's staff. You should read it, it's pretty funny. [They were] making great emphasis on all of the typos in all of the articles. Helen O'Connell of Dundee, D-U-N-D-I-E. I hope you'll read it, it's very funny. Percy couldn't make it to the birthday party, but he sent his regrets. Percy would have had a Christmas Party and even though I was on the floor and not on his staff, I was invited and I got a gift.

¹ Wide Area Telephone Service, a telephone line that provided long distance service at fixed rates.

I don't know what this is, but I can't bear to throw it away. I must have been with Percy when he was making remarks. His writing is very difficult to read. It's not dated. I can't tell from the legislation he's describing, where it goes. But as I say, I couldn't bear to throw it away.

Page School, we had directories so we knew where everybody lived. We had our portraits taken for the yearbook. Some of my mischievous page friends autographed the back of my book cover. USP? U.S. Page, I guess. They must have taken my book away and just decided to draw on it.

The rule was that you could only be in the yearbook if you were there second semester. I was only there first semester, which was keenly disappointing to me. I really wanted to be in the yearbook. Paulette Desell, bless her heart, took it upon herself to circulate a petition asking that I be included in the yearbook. It didn't happen, but this I also can't throw away. There are so many people's names that I remember and I have their signatures right here.

SAROVICH: That is so sweet.

BLAKEMAN: Isn't that cute? But that explains why Julie, who was there second semester, is in the yearbook and I'm not.

Here's the end. My term ends and here's the next boy who came after me. He gets his dream. This is more of the end, congratulations. There's a pay stub. These are in the wrong place. First Senate page put to work. Yes, this is in the wrong date. These are all May. When I get this back, that will have to be moved.

SCOTT: Can you tell me about some of the duties you would be doing? After you set up the desks in the morning, once the Senate floor action was under way, what types of things did you do?

BLAKEMAN: When a senator stood up to speak we would automatically get water. We would have to remember what kind of water they wanted. [Barry] Goldwater [R-AZ] wanted bubbly. He wanted carbonated water. When you walked up to him he would say, "Bubbly," and we would say, "We know." When we had our tour last spring I saw in the cloakroom posted all of the beverage choices. Senator X gets this. Tea, of course, there are many more than there used to be. We would run trips. Check the ticker. Frequently on Friday afternoons the leadership would send out an "all senators," so we would have to distribute a memo to all the Republican senators. It would always be late on a Friday afternoon. We had to go around. As you know, the senators' offices are not

[right next to each other]. You are going back and forth. We only had two buildings to contend with then. I'm sure it's even more time consuming now. I also don't remember if we divided it up. We probably should have. "You do one office building." The abbreviation S.O.B. You do all O.S.O.B and I'll do all N.S.O.B. We should have done that. The cloakroom should have insisted on it, but I don't think we did.

SCOTT: Did you work much with the cloakroom staff? Did you develop a close relationship with them?

BLAKEMAN: They were the ones who were sending us out on trips. Sometimes it was delivering flags. Sometimes it was delivering from Percy's office to Javits' office. Sometimes we went to the House. Each trip would be documented, "Office A to Office B," we would have the trip slip and when we came back and it was completed, we would sign it, and then file it. One of the pages with whom I worked managed to insinuate himself into the cloakroom. He was on behind the desks answering phones while the rest of us were running around. Kirby was good that way. He had a little less physical exertion than the rest of us. The cloakroom was in charge, we would occasionally, on Saturdays when we'd have to work, even though the Senate wasn't in session, that's where we'd hang out and we could read, do homework, if we wanted.

I remember the movie actress who was in—Jennifer Jones—showed up one Saturday at the cloakroom, being escorted by someone. I didn't know who she was. She's a famous movie actress. "The Song of Bernadette," does that ring a bell? Something like that. I thought, oh, okay. There you are. I was trying not to be disrespectful. There was one funny time with Percy. He was supposed to be in Chicago, I think, giving a speech. The Senate's business was delayed so he was still there. He ended up giving his speech from a telephone booth in the cloakroom, much to the hilarity of all the other pages. At that point he was developing a little kind of a hearing problem, not debilitating, but you notice he spoke a little more loudly than you would [expect] so he's on the phone [shouting] DELIVERING THE SPEECH and the door is kind of open. The pages just thought that was the funniest thing. Julie tells a story about Percy too. We were on TV, maybe we were recorded at the Senate TV studio—

SCOTT: Recording Studio.

BLAKEMAN: Yes, being the media savvy politician that he was, and businessman, he had makeup on. Julie thought that was the first time she had ever seen a man wear makeup and she thought that was just incredible. It's so memorable that she tells the story to this day: "Percy was wearing makeup!"

[Talking about scrapbooks] This is all out of order. May 19. It's in the wrong place. This is all in the wrong place.

SAROVICH: Do you think they are duplicates?

BLAKEMAN: No, I don't. I plead being overwhelmed.

SCOTT: Are you a registered Republican, at this point, do you think?

BLAKEMAN: In Illinois you don't have to declare.

SCOTT: In the '72 election did you vote for President Nixon?

BLAKEMAN: Yes.

I'm sorry. I wonder if we should sort through this and bring it back?

SCOTT: Okay, do you want me to turn this off for a sec?

BLAKEMAN: No, I mean Sheila and I, when we're done would go out and sort and give you something that's intact.

SCOTT: Okay.

SAROVICH: It's all together. I think it needs to move.

BLAKEMAN: I'm sorry.

SCOTT: That's okay, no need to apologize.

SAROVICH: This belongs really in the other book.

BLAKEMAN: No, this was the final insult from Robert Dunphy. "My records indicate that you did not turn in your Senate ID card." Am I going to do that? He asked me to send it back by return mail. I'm not going to do that! I don't know where the card is now, but I was not going to give him the satisfaction of sending it back.

SCOTT: What was the security like around here then? What do you remember about Senate security and the Capitol Police?

BLAKEMAN: I remember a police presence, not being overwhelmed, in the building. I don't remember a police presence out on the street. One of the rules was that I had to be escorted, and there was a page, Joe Doss, who lived around the corner from me with his mother. He would walk by the dorm and I would wait by the front door until the white shirt walked by and then walk with him. At night, I'm guessing he and I were probably dismissed at the same time so the same thing could happen. I don't remember ever asking a policeman to take me home, maybe I did, I don't remember.

SCOTT: Did you do sightseeing on the weekends, if you weren't visiting with friends or something? Would you go around and look at things?

BLAKEMAN: A little bit. I think the Smithsonian was a fun destination, especially the first ladies' dresses. I never tired of looking at that. I don't remember much other sightseeing. I think we were probably tired on the weekends, especially getting up that early for school. It was dark. Now, I stand corrected a little bit. Once school started there was some weekend socializing with other pages. We would go to a restaurant or go to a library and do homework, go out to brunch. It was teenage socializing. Sometimes I would walk downtown and go to Woody's. It took a couple weekends for me to figure out how to manage my money over the weekend. The dorm served Sunday breakfast, but that was it. I don't know what they did on Saturday. One of my first weekends I caught myself with no money and no food. That was pretty painful. But I learned to never let that—I'm going all over town trying to cash a check, which couldn't happen. I don't know how I managed, but it only happened once.

SCOTT: Pages were pretty well paid, weren't they?

BLAKEMAN: Yes, more than \$7,000 a year. There are a couple articles in here with people complaining about that. You are 16, 17 years old. Of course, you had all your expenses too. Your uniform, your dorm, buying your books.

This is after [my page service], I went to the Kane County Fair with Percy and registered to vote.

SAROVICH: He really did capitalize.

BLAKEMAN: Oh yes. He said in my birthday tribute his press secretary notes that I generated a lot of positive publicity and much safer than being shot at in Vietnam. I'm telling the story about a practical joke that was played on me.

SCOTT: Bill stretcher?

BLAKEMAN: Yes. That summer after I graduated from high school I worked in Percy's office and got to go to the convention, which was fun. I would say—

SCOTT: That's interesting. Julie also went to the convention; she went to the Democratic Convention.

BLAKEMAN: She was a delegate, I was a page, which is why I was wearing that and the Nixon button.

SCOTT: Well, you have to tell me about that, what was that like?

BLAKEMAN: Well, it was four more years. He was running for reelection. [Chanting] "Four more years! Four more years!" This was August, the Watergate break-in had occurred. No one knew the extent of the malfeasance.

SCOTT: It happened in June, so there hadn't been too much coverage yet.

BLAKEMAN: Right. It was very interesting to be there. I confess that I shirked my duties.

SCOTT: In what way, what did you do instead?

BLAKEMAN: There would be a page headquarters of some kind and they would field phone calls from people back home who wanted to get a message to delegate "x." We were supposed to go to that state's delegation seating area and try to find delegate "x." Impossible! The person wouldn't be there. I think I just quit reporting back to headquarters and just walked around and listened to the speeches and soaked it in. W. Clement Stone had a reception for the Illinois Republicans at a hotel, pool-side with great food and he greeted everybody. Did he have a cosmetic company? Or toiletries or something? He handed out tchotchkes, everybody got a little party bag. I hung out with other Percy staff members who were there.

SCOTT: Those you knew from Washington?

BLAKEMAN: Oh yes, roomed with Nadine Jacobsen, the executive secretary. It was a great time. There were other young Republican organizations that were having parties, kegs, stuff like that. Of course I wasn't old enough for any of that, but I'm sure I went to some of it. [All laugh] It was fun. We flew on the plane with the Illinois delegation, we were all on the same plane. It was fun. Then [I] go back to start college.

Every once in a while I would get letters from girls who wanted to be pages. I don't remember if I responded. There wasn't much I could do. "Write to your senator." I don't know you. I'm not going to put in a good word for you. One of my swim teammates really wanted to be a page. I think I did put in a good word for her because she was a good, solid girl. The problem was you are appointing two girls from basically the same part of the state. Does that make sense politically? I never had the heart to tell Debbie Davie that I didn't think it was going to happen. Years later, I worked at a PR agency. Percy visited my high school. Someone in his office said, "Wasn't that where Ellen went? Could we find her, get her to come and sit on the stage with Percy for the visit?" Well, it all came together and I did and that was pretty fun.

Here are some pictures, more "Dear Ellen, I want to be a page," letters. Dundee High School. Set to visit school. That was pretty cool. This must be part of an appearance he made either at the school, or—this is also in the wrong place too. We're going to have to do some—

Then in college it happened that there were two girls in the same sorority that were pages.

SAROVICH: Who was the other?

BLAKEMAN: This says Jean Harris, but it was Amy Hunt. I think Jean, maybe Jean was a page at Springfield.

SCOTT: You were a Tri-Delt?

BLAKEMAN: Yes.

Years later there is more about pages in *Seventeen*. This is just pictures, I see you have that same one.

Paulette and I have our pictures in here. This was cool. While we were there they took an official Senate portrait. That's me right in the front. That was a little dicey because we all wanted to be in the picture and when you are in the front you are the next one to do a trip. I got up to the front and thought, "Oh, please don't send me on a trip."

SCOTT: "I've got the best spot!"

BLAKEMAN: "I want to be in the photo!" They took it from the Republican side. You see the poor Democratic pages are doing like that [craning their necks to be seen]. Then we've had some reunions and this is memorabilia.

SCOTT: How did you get involved with the Capitol Page School Alumni Association? What brought you to that group?

BLAKEMAN: I was in the database of former pages. I was contacted that way and joined. Since then I have been asked to be on the board. I was flattered to be asked and eagerly agreed. That's what brings me here.

SCOTT: That's how we lucked out and got an interview with you!

BLAKEMAN: Finally, Percy dies, it was 2011. He was in his 90s and had been suffering from Alzheimer's. After I left Washington I really didn't have any contact with him at all, more his staff. A couple years ago when I was coming here I wanted to get with his press secretary. I'm not sure what happened. I reached out to her and she never got back to me. I'm not sure how to interpret that.

It [lists] of a lot of achievements of his, none of them are girl pages.

SCOTT: Is that right?

BLAKEMAN: Now, these pictures, some are duplicates. If I have dupes, I brought both of them and I will tell you if you just want to take one for yourself, take it. These are duplicates.

SCOTT: Our photo historian would be thrilled to have these.

BLAKEMAN: Now here I have a triplicate.

SAROVICH: God, look at that. Did you make that coat?

BLAKEMAN: Yes.

SAROVICH: She did. That is priceless.

BLAKEMAN: I did not make this one. Here he is again, with the arms!

Here we are here being sworn in, signing our paperwork. Duplicates of this. The TV show.

SCOTT: She says, “You’re delightful.”

BLAKEMAN: This boy’s name is Cliff Ahoye, he was Senator [Hiram] Fong’s [R-HI] page from Hawaii. He was a long ways from home. I don’t remember how to spell his name. He was a nice guy. This must be a going away party. I think a going away because I’m wearing a turtleneck, which would have been winter. Here is the State of the Union.

SCOTT: That’s funny, what’s the story there?

BLAKEMAN: I’m probably saying something like, “Please don’t send me on a trip.” Most of these staff people, I don’t remember their names.

I’m sorry his handwriting is hard to read.

SAROVICH: Read that! Read that out loud!

BLAKEMAN: “Let’s not let my wife Lorraine see this. She might not understand it to be a goodbye-for-now kiss. We’ll miss you.”

SCOTT: That is an awkward photo.

BLAKEMAN: The Rose Garden. [Looking at photos.]

SCOTT: Did you experience any kind of harassment while you were here? How were you treated by the other boy pages and by the members and staff?

BLAKEMAN: I would have to say none that I was aware of. No. I don’t think I was ever hit on. The boys were just as nice as could be. We were equally eligible for practical jokes. The boys were fine. I think they sort of liked it. I think the tenor of the school changed, even as few of us as there were. I was certainly aware that the culture of what was basically a boys’ school was quite different from what I was accustomed to. I think the boys are more blunt and frankly spoken than girls tend to be. I don’t think that’s a school thing, I think that’s a boy/girl thing. They seemed to enjoy having us around. They would arrange dances with girls’ schools and we girls went. I don’t know if the girls at the school were offended, but we felt entitled to go.

SCOTT: These were local schools then?

BLAKEMAN: Yes, but I don't remember the names of any of them. I know I went to one.

SCOTT: You know that the House has closed its page program. If you heard rumors that the Senate was considering a similar action, what would you say in defense of the program? Or would you defend the program?

BLAKEMAN: Certainly. It is not an exaggeration—and you've heard this word many times before—to say that it was a transformative experience. I don't have statistics, but it is commonly known, I think, that a high percentage of pages go on to some sort of public service, not necessarily becoming senators, although it has happened, but a disproportionate representation on school boards, mayors, village boards, political organizations. I think that you are cultivating a special group of young people who have had a special experience. I think the pages perform a useful function. For that reason it would be tragic to have it disbanded.

We did enjoy our relationships with members. I know now that some of the senators make a point of being social with the pages. Al Franken [D-MN] will throw pizza parties for the Senate pages and attend graduation—it's not really graduation but their commencement thing. Harry Reid [D-NV] has stated explicitly that the Senate program has nothing to worry about. They seem to be endorsing it. I think having young people around makes the gravitas of what the senators are doing all the more apparent.

I interviewed a couple of pages who just graduated last spring. No, the House page had been graduated a couple years before. I would say they are just as idealistic as we were 40 years ago. They look up to the senators. "We hold these men and women in high esteem." It's making an impact. The problems with the House program are tragic. The split of the House and the Senate programs, I think, is very unfortunate. Naïve. I think that they could have solved their problems. I'm particularly disappointed because this was such a large part of my experience, that the school is split. Being able to go to school with the House pages, some of whom were from our state, some of whom weren't, was a big part of the experience, a big part. Just the sheer volume of young people in the same place, you could have a student counsel that meant something, you could have a newspaper, a yearbook that meant something. Also, the House pages were juniors and seniors and the Senate pages could be as young as freshman. I didn't have much truck with a 14 year old boy. Paulette and I, being seniors, really did gravitate toward the older House pages. It was a big part of the social experience.

SCOTT: So you all did things together?

BLAKEMAN: Yes, yes. She had the advantage of living at home on one hand, but the disadvantage of not living on the Hill. She had to be driven in at an ungodly hour by her dad. She would often be dismissed early. It was after work and he was up in the gallery so they would send Paulette home. She missed some of that. She missed the Sunday brunches and a couple times she probably came in from Alexandria to just participate in a Saturday afternoon thing. Not being here, she didn't have quite the same experience.

SCOTT: Any final thoughts that you'd like to leave us with about your experience, maybe how it prepared you for your career later on? Or the things you learned here that helped you, either as a citizen, or a professional?

SAROVICH: Can I answer that? Do you mind? I was one of the readers of this *Seventeen* magazine, also from Illinois. I read this article and I said, "This is amazing. I would love to do this." I didn't send you a letter because by the time it was in the article, I don't know which one it was, I was a senior in high school (we're the same age). I also went to the University of Illinois. I also pledged the same sorority. We're from different parts of the state. It's not that big of a state, but we're from different parts. When we all show up that night to say these are my new sorority sisters, I recognize her from *Seventeen* magazine. She says her name. I said, "You were the first girl page in the U.S. Senate."

SCOTT: It had an impact on you?

SAROVICH: It had a big impact on me, yes.

BLAKEMAN: As far as applying legislative strategies to subsequent public relations issues, I would have to say, not too much overlap. Certainly [it provided me with] a keen consciousness of political activity, probably much more even today than at the time. I didn't aspire to political office, although if I had pursued that arena it would have been more of the power behind the throne concept, the press secretary, the administrative aide, although my background is not in poli sci or public policy. When at one point I was asked if I would run for school board that was an easy thing to say yes for. I enjoyed that experience immensely. Later, in working with daycare boards, for instance, and doing community outreach, maybe some of the ideas percolated as far as say, picking a committee to judge a teacher's competition. Knowing that we had to reach out, we need the park district guy, we need the minister, we need—so that kind of consciousness.

SCOTT: Do you have children?

BLAKEMAN: Two boys. They don't know anything about this. It doesn't come up.

SCOTT: Are you still a political person in the sense of, do you follow politics?

BLAKEMAN: Very much so, very much so. I vote. I'm not an activist, but certainly follow.

SCOTT: Maybe you can give them a copy of this oral history and they can read about what you did.

BLAKEMAN: Which raises the question: what's going to happen to this?

SCOTT: We're going to type it up and we'll present it to you and you can read it, edit it. At some point we'd like to include it in a collection of the first girl pages.

BLAKEMAN: Will that be published?

SCOTT: It will. If you give us your permission, we'd like to put it online. We have an online collection. We'd eventually like to bind it in a volume that looks a little bit like this.

BLAKEMAN: We'll want to put something on the Capitol Page website, with a link to this. We now have a partnership with the Historical Society. Well, you do, too. Would you be providing this as content to the Historical Society?

SCOTT: If they wanted it. I can talk to you about that after.

BLAKEMAN: Okay. I think we are done. Oh! I did want to say. You were talking about the value of the program. I'll tell you an anecdote. I didn't hear it first hand, so I'm paraphrasing. One of the pages said to another page. "I was a page. I went to MIT. I worked for NASA. You know the ring I wear? My page ring." When I tell that story to other pages, they have exactly your expression. It resonates. It was a big deal. The boys, the 65th boy from West Virginia who didn't have a single sentence written about him, it was just that big of a deal. A lot of us are still active in government. There are a lot of lobbyists. A lot of lawyers working in different public areas, employment law, one of the

board members is a senior planner for Metro. You don't get any more public policy than public transportation. A lot of professions that are related to our experience.

SCOTT: You have this front row seat to see how the process works and I think that can translate to so many things later on in life. Things that you can do at the community level, being on the daycare board, or something, but also in a larger sense at the state level, at the national level, being members of organizations because you have a knowledge that a lot of other people just don't have. Right?

It's not a textbook type of thing, it's an experience.

BLAKEMAN: Yes, very much so.

SCOTT: I really, really appreciate you joining us today. You have come a long way.

BLAKEMAN: It's kind of self-indulgent, but kind of fun!

SCOTT: Typically, I would start the interview by asking you to introduce yourselves. Maybe you could just do that now.

It's October 17, 2013, and I'm joined here by:

BLAKEMAN: Ellen McConnell Blakeman, Senate page for Senator Charles Percy.

SAROVICH: I'm Sheila Sarovich, resident of Illinois and a friend of Ellen Blakeman's.

SCOTT: Perfect, thank you so much. Thank you.

[End of Interview]

[*Pictures on the following page, clockwise from top left:* Ellen McConnell, one of the Senate's first female pages; McConnell and Paulette Desell with their sponsors, Charles Percy (R-IL) and Jacob Javits (R-NY) (*to the left*), and Senate Sergeant at Arms Robert Dunphy (*to the right*); McConnell and Desell are sworn into office with sponsoring senators Percy and Javits; Senator Percy shakes McConnell's hand; McConnell serves Senator Percy coffee.]

