Good morning. It's Friday, March 1, 2019. I'm Michael Camp, assistant professor and Political Papers Archivist in Ingram Library here at the University of West Georgia. We're here today with Nellie Dunaway Duke, former chair of the Georgia Commission on Women, and a long-time activist in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment, in addition to a number of other activities. Ms. Duke will be talking today about some of her life experiences and highlights of her personal and professional careers. Ms. Duke, welcome to the University of West Georgia.

Thank you. I feel like I've come home. I was here back in May, if you remember, spoke at the commencement ceremony.

Well, we're glad you're back here today, too.

Thank you.

Let's start at the beginning. Can you talk a little bit about your early life, where you grew up, your parents, things like that?

Well, you want to start with where I was born?

Sure.

Well, I sometimes joke and say that I was born in a cave, that isn't totally true, but I was born in Cave Spring, Georgia about a mile from the cave at my grandparents' house, because I came a month early so that I could be born on International Women's Day. And my parents happened to be there. Well anyway, my younger years were spent in Rome in a mill village. At that time, the mill village was called Tubize, well it started out with Chatillon Mills. It was the first rayon mill in the United States. My dad helped build the equipment, the pipe, the structure that serviced the plants, the chemicals that went into the plant. But anyway, that's where I grew up. The mill owned everything there, the house we lived in, the church I went to, the school I attended, the clinic where the doctor was, everything. You know that old saying about, "It takes a village to raise a child?" Well, that village raised me. I lived there until I was in about the ninth grade. The school only went through the ninth grade and then you had to transfer somewhere else.
Nellie Duke: 00:02:16 Well, I could have gone to one of the county schools, but I decided I wanted to go to Girls' High in the city, so we moved to the city and I went Girls' High School, that's where I graduated. I played basketball and I did some other things. It was interesting because we had a Girls' High and a Boys' High. Well, the only way you could see any of the boys during school was to take either chemistry or physics, so I did. Not for that reason, of course, I thought I needed it. Anyway, it was an interesting experience and I graduated. I had only been... I was... I started school when I was four, so I graduated from high school when I was barely sixteen. After that, I decided I wanted to go to business school. I made a mistake. I didn't fit in there. I went to the Carroll Lynn School of Business. Now, the one good thing about it was that they taught me to type and some things that I still use, and the experience was a good one. I did not complete my enrollment there.

Nellie Duke: 00:03:40 But I went to work for JC Penney Company, and I did their advertising, and some of the things that you would be surprised a teenager would do, but I was good at it, I was creative. Then lo and behold, when I was almost eighteen, on December 16, 1948, I met the love of my life. Somebody knocked at my front door. It was a blind date that had been arranged for me. I opened the door and there he stood. He didn't look anything like he did in the picture that he showed me, he had long, blonde hair, you know, curved over and everything. Then I went to the door to answer and he had a flat top. He looked different, but he was still good looking, and I was impressed. Well, we went on that blind date, and on the way home he told his friend, Tom, "That's the girl I'm going to marry." Well, the day we got married, four months later, which is not very long, is it? Tom told me that, and I said, "Oh, Tom, if you'd told me that I'd have played a lot harder to get." He thought that was funny.

Nellie Duke: 00:05:06 Anyway, we known each other a total of four months when we were married, and we were married for a total of sixty-six years, two months, and fifteen days before he passed. That was the beginning of the most important part of my life. Within ten years, well let's see, within ten years I had five children. I had four boys and one girl. Gary, Carol, Kenneth, Alan, and Michael, still have them. And them the most important thing I've got right now, my children, and my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren. And I'm expecting yet another great-grandchild in the near future. I worked for ten or twelve, let's see, I worked for a while for Sears. They enrolled me at the University of Chicago, and I learned to be a decorator consultant. I haven't done that for a while, but I did it for several years for Sears. Then, after that, after my children... I think it was starting in
1955... No, that was when I worked for Sears. It's hard to remember when you're this old and this has been going on. But in 1970, I went to work for the American Cancer Society, and I worked for them for twelve years. Retired from them after falling down the steps and injuring myself.

Nellie Duke: 00:06:45 But that's been... I've been involved in practically everything in the Women's Movement. Now, you may wonder why, or how, I got involved in the Women's Movement. Well, back in the '60s when I was doing research, I was looking at law books and I kept seeing a recurring statement as a footnote. "The above does not apply to women, idiots, or children." I was offended by it, for good reason, and I began to research and find out why in the world would they say things like that about women? And why would it be in legal books, law books? I spent the next number of years not only researching it, but advocating for women's rights, from that time through now. Now, I've slowed down considerably. I may be operating from the house, I may be on the phone or the computer on the internet, but I've not quit. And many of my friends say that they're carrying on the work for me and I know that they are, especially my husband's cousin, Dr. Peggy Duke, who has taken on the role as chair of ERA Georgia.

Nellie Duke: 00:08:09 We are still working. Those footnotes, by the way, are no longer being put into law books, they're out of there, thank goodness. But we're still trying to get the Equal Rights Amendment passed, because women are not in the Constitution.

Michael Camp: 00:08:28 Going back to your early life, your mother organized textile workers?

Nellie Duke: 00:08:33 My mother was who inspired me.

Michael Camp: 00:08:35 Yeah. Can you talk a bit about her and how that influenced your views about social justice?

Nellie Duke: 00:08:39 Well, my mother grew up as a country girl, but her parents allowed her to be involved in stuff, that was unusual back then. She married my dad in 1930, and in 1931, they moved to Rome, to that village I told you about, and mother went to work inside the mill. She was actually working out in the plant. Now my dad was what they called a steamfitter, or pipe fitter, I would now call him a plumber, I think, but at that time he was a steamfitter and provided that kind of work for the mill. In fact, he built the swimming pool at that plant and I was the first one to get to go swimming in it. I was two, two years old when I learned to swim in that pool. But my mother was so enthusiastic about getting
people involved in the textile workers’ union, organizing it. One did not exist, she helped to get it started. She was part of the inspiration for it. Working out in the plant, she was so good at it, that the people of the management became a little upset. You know what they did?

Nellie Duke: 00:10:06 It took her a while to realize their motivation, their reason for doing it, but they made her a manager. Well, management can’t be a part of the labor union, in recruitment and promoting. Well, that didn’t keep her from encouraging people, but it did keep her from organizing anymore. For forty years she was in management. It was... She is an inspiration to me. She died in 2008, I think it was. Before she died I said, "Mother, how did it happen that you had me on International Women's Day?" She said, "It wasn’t me. It was you. You decided to come that day. You came a month early." I guess it was intended to be.

Michael Camp: 00:10:57 So, when you were twelve, you noticed that the Baptists with which you were congregating wouldn’t let women lead in church.

Nellie Duke: 00:11:05 At our church, every Sunday, it rotated. One Sunday it was Baptist, the next it was Methodist. Those were the two major denominations, anyway. They were in the same building, but they took turns. Now, in Sunday school, and vacation church school, only they called it Bible school back then, it was all the same. But I was required to go every Sunday, whether it was Baptist or Methodist. I began to notice something different. Now, this is different today, this is not a criticism of the Baptist Church, this is telling you how it was. Back then, on Baptist Sunday, women were not involved in anything, nor were little girls, except whatever the men did and told them to do. One Methodist Sunday, women provided some of the leadership and involvement in whatever was going on. I noticed this, and I was somewhat impacted by it. When I was twelve years old I joined the Methodist Church on Methodist Sunday and my grandparents had a fit, but that’s okay. They got used to it, they came to the conclusion it was the right thing to do, but that’s why I did it. And I’ve never... I’ve been a Methodist ever since, kind of like how I became a Democrat.

Michael Camp: 00:12:49 Through a similar process?

Nellie Duke: 00:12:50 Well, yeah. I was watching, I saw what was going on and what women were a part of.
Michael Camp: 00:12:59 You talked about when you were in high school, in the chemistry and physics classes and you had noticed that they were only being taught to males.

Nellie Duke: 00:13:06 Right, and they would come... let's see, some of the classes the boys would come down from Boys' High, which was two blocks away. Some of the classes the girls would go up to Boys' High. And I took two classes that I could go to. The other thing that I wanted to get involved, I wanted to go to the football games. Well, it was too late, I thought, for me to learn to play an instrument and be in the marching band, which was a wonderful band, but there I was. I went over there as a junior in high school and I looked around and said, "How in the world am I going to get to be a part of this, so that I can go to the games out of town?" And I had the awakening that I needed to be a cheerleader.

Nellie Duke: 00:13:54 So back then, I don't know how they do it now, but back then it was a popularity contest. You tried out for it, and then they voted. Well, I was brand new in town, brand new. I looked around and I thought, oh my, look, all these girls in the junior and senior class already have their cliques, their friends, they're going to vote for them, they're not going to vote for me. But there are more freshmen and sophomores than there are juniors and seniors, and if I concentrate my time on getting them to vote for me, I just might win. So that's what I did, and guess what, I got more votes than anybody because there were more freshman and sophomores and the other people ignored them. They concentrated on their peers. I learned that you be inclusive, is what I learned.

Michael Camp: 00:14:55 And you said that this process of trying to become a cheerleader was how you learned to be political?

Nellie Duke: 00:15:00 That is true. It's the same thing. You should isolate yourself from any group of people, if you're in politics.

Michael Camp: 00:15:10 Good advice. So you did cheerleading, can you talk about your experience playing semi-professional basketball?

Nellie Duke: 00:15:17 Oh, yes. Well, I started out playing basketball at the mill village, at the school there when I was in elementary school and it was... I just got good at it, sort of like swimming, I was on the swim team there. I learned to swim, I started when I was two, you know? So when I got to high school I played basketball again, and I graduated from high school, I was barely sixteen, and I decided that I had to still play basketball because I would miss that, something athletic I had to do. Well, there wasn't
anything going on until suddenly a sponsor came up for a semi-
pro team that would travel in Tennessee, Alabama, and
Georgia. When I heard about it I decided to try out for it. I
thought, well if I could play high school and grammar school
baby ball I can play pro. I made the team.

Nellie Duke: 00:16:37 And when we first started, it was interesting. The rules in the
beginning were that there were three people on one end of the
court and three on the other. The people down here could not
cross the center line and go play on the other end or shoot.
Then, it began to evolve that the guard who threw the ball
across the center line could follow it down to the other end of
the court. Called that position running guard, that's the position
I played. I played it because I wanted to shoot. It evolved into
that and that was a lot of fun. Then, low and behold, a little bit
later we could dribble all we wanted, we could travel on both
ends of the court and shoot all we wanted to. I've kind of taken
that as an inspiration to my thinking that I can do whatever I
want to.

Michael Camp: 00:17:44 Yeah, certainly. You talked about the blind date on which you
met your soon-to-be husband. Could you talk a bit more about
his background?

Nellie Duke: 00:17:53 Oh, he was from a railroad family. In fact, if you had been to our
house before he passed, every room had something relating to
the railroads. He started out with [inaudible 00:18:07] of
Georgia, which later became Southern Railway, and then a little
later, Norfolk Southern. He retired in '87 and it was called
Norfolk Southern. One of our sons, the one with whom I am
living now, retired recently from Norfolk Southern Railway.
Henry's, my husband was Henry, his grandfather was engineer
on one first passenger trains ever, over in South Carolina. It was
called the “Best Friend of Charleston.” His name was John Henry
Horton, Henry was named for him and his other grandfather
William Jasper Duke, so he was William Henry Duke. And we've
taken those names and given them to two of our boys too.

Nellie Duke: 00:19:01 Anyway, his grandfather, on that train, met his grandmother
over there somewhere and they moved to Augusta. That was
the main place for the railroad for a long time. And Henry's
mother was born while they lived in Augusta. When she grew
up, she married... they had moved to Cedartown, which was, at
that time, was a very active part of Central Georgia Railway.
When Henry was seventeen, the day he became eighteen
he was drafted, it was during World War II and he had to leave
immediately. He went to Louisiana, where he had basic training.
He went to Italy, northern Italy, up near the border. He was up
there when the war ended and also when... what was the name of that man that kept trying to come across the border? Anyway, he... I found a letter not long ago that said, "Mom and dad, don't worry about him coming across the border, as long as I'm standing there with my rifle, he won't get here." Talking about the troops coming in from the other country.

Nellie Duke: 00:20:28 But he came back from World War II and he was going to go to school, but when he got back the railroad tried to get him as a telegraph operator. The reason they did that, he had been a radio operator in the military, and telegraphy was part of it. So he said, "Okay, it's a family tradition." His dad, by the way, was a conductor, Ed Duke. In fact, a few years ago I was trying to organize a train ride from Chattanooga to Summerville and back for the Osteoporosis Initiative called the Stop Osteoporosis Special. And I heard about a man up there near LaFayette somewhere, I forget, Mangum was his name is all I can remember right now. But he owned a short line railroad. And I thought, okay, that's where I can get my train.

Nellie Duke: 00:21:36 And I called Mr. Mangum and I said, "My name is Nellie Duke. I'm looking for a train to have an osteoporosis special from Chattanooga to Summerville and back." He said, "Well, I have engines." And he said, "Did you say your name is Duke?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Did you ever know Ed Duke, the conductor on the railroad?" I said, "Well yes, he's my father-in-law." He said, "Oh no." He said, "When I was a little boy, he would throw me candy from the train, or if the train stopped in our town he would let me get on and he'd let me blow the whistle. He showed me how to connect the engine to the car and that's what made me want to own a railroad." He said, "It's because of your father-in-law that I'm owner of this railroad. Yes, I will give you a train. You don't have to pay for it, but you will have to rent some cars from over in Chattanooga." So that's what we did and the first Osteoporosis Special was a free ride from Mr. Mangum because of Mr. Duke, the railroad man-

Michael Camp: 00:22:45 [crosstalk 00:22:45].

Nellie Duke: 00:22:45 ... the conductor. You know, you don't think about when you're doing something that thirty years later, or forty years later, it'll come back to help you, so do something good.

Michael Camp: 00:22:58 Sometimes it does, yeah.

Nellie Duke: 00:23:00 It does. And we ended up having eight different trains, different parts of the state, and it was so much fun. If I felt better, I'd do it again.
Michael Camp: 00:23:13 It sounds like a good time.

Nellie Duke: 00:23:15 Maybe you'll do it for me.

Michael Camp: 00:23:16 Maybe I will.

Nellie Duke: 00:23:18 Mr. Mangum is no longer living, so you can't have his train.

Michael Camp: 00:23:23 You found yourself in a very interesting position upon getting married because your husband liked to make wine at home, but you were a member of the Women's Christian Temperance-

Nellie Duke: 00:23:32 Well, that was a long time before he... see, I had signed a pledge, back in 1950, I think it was, I'd been married a year or two, it was with the Women's Christian Temperance Union, you know they don't send me any dues notices anymore, so I think maybe they've gone out of business. But anyway, I signed that pledge that I would never drink and I never have. I've had a few people tell me, "Why, Nellie, that should have expired by now." I think, yeah, but I haven't. So anyway, he knew that, of course, so he wanted to make some wine. And back in, I think it was the late '60s, we were living on Sunset Boulevard. We had just moved back from Savannah, I think. He'd been transferred down there and then back again. I don't know. I may have all of this out of order. But anyway, I missed him and I said, "Honey, where are you?" He said, "I'm down here in the basement." I said, "What are you doing down there?" He said, "Oh, I was afraid you'd be mad. I'm making wine." Then I said, "But you didn't sign the pledge, I did. You do whatever you like."

Nellie Duke: 00:24:50 He became very popular, believe me, everybody liked that. One of his most interested consumers of blackberry wine was Speaker Tom Murphy. He and Henry would go blackberry picking so they'd have blackberries to make blackberry wine. I thought that was funny. Can you see the Speaker of the House of Representatives out in the woods picking blackberries to make homemade wine? Well, he was a good fellow. The reason we got to know him was partly because the things I was doing in the legislature, with the legislature, not in opposition, but with.

Michael Camp: 00:25:42 You've been interested in women's rights, obviously, but also-

Nellie Duke: 00:25:45 Oh, yes. That's my mantra.

Michael Camp: 00:25:48 But in 1964 you got involved in the civil rights struggle that was at its height when you-
Absolutely, yes.

... integrated a bus. Can you talk about that incident?

Would you repeat that question.

In 1964, you integrated a bus.

Oh, the bus.

Yeah.

It was '65 or '66, but it was during that period. I'm not exactly sure, you'd have to ask - The young lady that remembers it best is working at the hospital, and she's not a young lady, more of an old woman, excuse me. But anyway, what happened was there was so much going on that was disturbing and I didn't like that. I thought that we should be getting along, and we should integrate peacefully. I was trying to return, at that time my children were all in high school, or upper elementary, or whatever, middle school, but I decided that I would rent a bus, oh my, I'm into transportation, I hadn't thought about that. I'd rent a bus, and we'd go to Macon to the basketball tournament. I loaded that bus up with people of every kind, boys, girls, a few men and women, and color, and made sure that it was totally integrated. In fact, I wouldn't let them sit on the back, I made them sit... the black students had to sit in the middle or the front and I mixed them up. I made sure they sat together, integrated. And that was an interesting thing. It was very unusual.

It wasn't the last time I did it, we went to things in Atlanta too, that was in Macon. But I also got buses to events in Atlanta that we would integrate, but last year I was going down the hall of the hospital and this young lady I was speaking of came up to me and gave me a hug and said, "I want to thank you." I said, "For what?" She said, "The first time I ever went anywhere with a white group was when you invited me to go to that basketball game." She said, "I will never forget it, and it has influenced my life." I said, "Well, it did mine too." And I really... she remembers and I sort of remember. It was one of many instances, but that's what we had to do and that's people had better start doing now, not deliberately planning things like that, but as a part of your life, to be integrated, inclusive.

That was in the 1960s, and in the 1970s you got involved with The American Cancer Society-
Nellie Duke: Oh, yeah.

Michael Camp: ... and also helping homeless individuals, especially homeless veterans. Can you talk about that period?

Nellie Duke: Well, I've helped veterans forever. There have been different times that I was helping just any veterans, but then there was the time I helped homeless, women veterans. Let's see, what was the first thing you wanted me to tell you about?

Michael Camp: The American Cancer Society.

Nellie Duke: Oh, the American Cancer Society. I started out as a volunteer and I got so involved they hired me. I started out with just a few counties, including this one. And first thing I knew I had nearly half the state that I was responsible for and I met a lot of really interesting people. For instance, Michael Mansour, who's the mayor over at Villa Rica, his mother was one of my volunteers down in Griffin, Georgia. I knew him when he was a little boy. But anyhow, the American Cancer Society, back then, did patients services, rehabilitation, along with fundraising, and research, and that sort of thing, public education, professional education. Held seminars all over everywhere, went everywhere, did everything. All that would be hard to describe, it went on for about twelve years. Then I kind of started doing other things.

Michael Camp: How did you get involved in the campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment in Georgia?

Nellie Duke: I established it. I started it. Well, there were other people that were doing things like Cathey Steinberg, and oh my, I should have brought some of my notes, but there were so many people that were a part of it, but the organization itself, I started.

Michael Camp: Can you talk about your interactions with politicians in the state, especially speaker Tom Murphy regarding the Equal Rights Amendment?

Nellie Duke: Well, it was interesting. You know how I got in the door?

Michael Camp: No.

Nellie Duke: My jelly, Nellie's Jelly. That was kind of... I still do that, by the way. The other day, well it's been a couple of months now, it was over at the capitol. I just happened to be standing in the
hallway and the governor came... at that time governor, we’ve changed-

Michael Camp:  00:31:52  Was that Nathan Deal?

Nellie Duke:  00:31:53  Nathan Deal, came down the hall and he was like, "Oh, Nellie. Have you got any of that mixed berry jam with you?" I looked at him and I said, "Well, yes, it just happens I’ve got some." I reached into my purse, that big, black purse, pulled out a jar of mixed berry jam and he grabbed it. That’s not a bribe, that’s a gift. There’s a difference. But I found that Speaker Murphy liked my jelly. I found that Pierre Howard liked it. Oh by the way, I was first appointed by Pierre Howard to the Commission on Women. Now, at the same time, the speaker, and the governor, and other people were going to appoint me too, but Pierre asked me first, so I accepted from him. And I’m still on that commission, twenty-seven years later. That was in 1992. That’s what... I remember back, I think it was 2008, I don’t know, recently, ’10, ’16, I don’t know when. I spoke to the Senate, I think it was in 2008, about women’s rights. It’s unusual for anybody during the session to be invited to speak.

Nellie Duke:  00:33:24  Now, I had... that was my second experience. I had been to the House before, about the military, but the Senate I was invited to speak, so after they were just so kind and everything. They were so responsive to what I had said. I said, "You have been so nice, I guess I’m going to have to make you a jar of jelly." Well, they all stood up in unison, started applauding and yelling. I thought, oh no, tomorrow is the last day. If I make any, I have to do it tonight. So I went home and I made sixty-five jars of strawberry preserves, I was up until two o’clock in the morning. I got them made, though and I called my friends, well they were my friends then, and after I woke them up at two o’clock in the morning I’m not sure. I said, "I'm not able to go, you're going to have to deliver this for me." So Betty Rose Bowers and Juliana McConnell delivered it. I got it to them and they took it to the Senate. They got to the door, now that’s when I wrote that poem about a jar of jelly can open doors.

Nellie Duke:  00:34:47  Okay. They got to door of the Senate and the door keeper said, "No, you can't come in." They said, "But we have Nellie Duke’s jelly to give to everybody." "Oh, okay." Well, so the doors were flung open wide, they went in and were allowed to go from desk, to desk, to desk and deliver jars of jelly. Well, they got to one, it was the only person in the entire Senate who had voted not to honor me, by the way, that’s what they did, they made me an honorary senator, now I remember the reason I was there, they had named me an honorary senator. But there was
one person who voted no, and my friend said, "We're not going
to give him one." I had already told them, "Yes, you are. We
don't do that." So they gave it to him, and you know what he
said? "If you have any left, could I have another one?" The
nerve. And he was the one person who voted against me. But
anyway, I've forgiven him. He's not in there anymore, we got rid
of him.

Michael Camp: 00:36:02 When you were campaigning for the Equal Rights Amendment
you had a debate with Phyllis Schlafly.

Nellie Duke: 00:36:07 Oh, yeah.

Michael Camp: 00:36:07 Who is a very prominent national opponent of the ERA.

Nellie Duke: 00:36:10 Oh, one of the most excruciating things that ever happened to
me was when I was debating her, or Sue Ellen Detwiler, one of
them, and it was at a Holiday Inn. I remember arriving there all
excited, thought it was going to be fun. And I looked over there
and there were two dozen women kneeling in the floor. I said to
one of... it was the Georgia Nurses Association meeting, and I
forget what town it was in, but it was the state meeting. And I
said, "What are they doing?" The nurse said, "Don't worry
Nellie, they're just praying that you will lose this debate." I said,
"Oh, no. I don't have time to pray." Back then, you'd take a
quarter and you'd go over and use the telephone. I went over
and called a friend and I said, I don't remember the name,
"Would you mind praying that they not trip me up over here? I
got to go talk." So I went in and we had the debate. It was
supposed to be a private meeting of nothing but nurses. Those
people crashed the meeting, they came in, and everything I
said, they booed and heckled me. At everything she said, they
went, "Yay!"

Nellie Duke: 00:37:40 Well, I just knew that this was going to end up in a bad way, but
at the conclusion of my remarks I said, "All right, now what I
want is for you as an organization to endorse the ratification
of the Equal Rights Amendment in Georgia." They voted
unanimously to ratify. So I said, "Well, I guess I won this debate
after all." That was an interesting thing that happened. But I
could go to the capitol and these... there were groups of radical
women who would see me there and come over and shout ugly
remarks. I've been called all kinds of things. I had a... one night,
well one morning at about five o'clock in the morning the phone
rang at our house and I answered it because it was on my side
of the bed. This man said, "Mrs. Duke, you're going to hell." I
said, "What?" He said, "You're going to hell, women are not
supposed to do what you do. You're supposed to stay at home
and take care of things." Well, I just handed the phone over to Henry who was laying over there. He listened for a minute, then he said, "Mr. Nash, I'm going to call you tonight after midnight and let you know what I really think of you." And handed me the phone to hang up.

Nellie Duke: 00:39:04 But he said before we got it hung up, "Oh, Mr. Duke, I didn't mean to wake you up." But that was interesting. He didn't mean to wake Henry up, but he wanted to wake me up and tell me I was going to hell. That was the kind of resistance I had. I learned to shrug it off. I cry sometimes, but so does everybody.

Michael Camp: 00:39:28 You said that the Equal Rights Amendment, in addition to helping women, also helps men.

Nellie Duke: 00:39:35 Well, of course-

Michael Camp: 00:39:36 Can you talk about what you mean?

Nellie Duke: 00:39:36 Supposing you were going through a divorce, or you were a widower, and you had issues about your children, or your properties, or whatever, to keep from being discriminated because you're a man, yeah, absolutely. All it says is that you will not discriminate against anybody on account of their sex, and by sex I mean gender.

Michael Camp: 00:40:04 Right. So there are a number of different issues that women in the past and today face, things like healthcare, education, other concerns, why do you think legal equality is the most important issue for women to be able to achieve?

Nellie Duke: 00:40:18 Well, everything has to answer to legal authority. Every issue, every person, everything. We all are subject to legal authority and it's just something that exists.

Michael Camp: 00:40:38 You've worked with a number of prominent individuals around the state, can you talk about working with Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter?

Nellie Duke: 00:40:44 Oh, I met them a long, long time ago and we continue our relationship. In fact, I think it was last year I gave Rosalynn the humanitarian award from the National Federation of Democratic Women. They asked me to be the presenter, but I've been to Plains, we've had things down there. They are really, truly good people, not just political, they're just good folk. And I'm very proud of the fact that they are my friends.
Michael Camp: 00:41:28 You talked about being appointed to the Georgia Commission on Women by Pierre Howard.

Nellie Duke: 00:41:32 Yes, he was lieutenant governor at the time.

Michael Camp: 00:41:35 Right. Can you talk some about what the organization did in its early years and how you were involved?

Nellie Duke: 00:41:39 Well, you want to know what its mission, or...

Michael Camp: 00:41:45 Yes.

Nellie Duke: 00:41:46 Well, its mission was to... oh goodness, I should have brought that, but anyway, we addressed or advocated for women in terms of legal issues, health, education, employment, rights, everything. And they have the authority to advocate especially with the legislature. Five of the members are appointed by the governor, five the lieutenant governor, and five the speaker. I was so honored that all three wanted to appoint me because of my advocacy during that period. In 1992 we had still been working on that.

Michael Camp: 00:42:44 You talked briefly about getting the train for the Stop Osteoporosis Special, but that was certainly a colorful incident in and of itself, can you talk about how all that played out?

Nellie Duke: 00:42:57 Why we had the Osteoporosis Initiative?

Michael Camp: 00:43:00 Why you had it, how it played out, and then your interaction with them.

Nellie Duke: 00:43:03 The reason was that we discovered... well, first of all, I met some people at a conference who were representing the... well, really, it was Proctor and Gamble, a pharmaceutical company, and they offered to support because I got interested in osteoporosis as a danger to all of the women in Georgia. Not only in Georgia, but in the United States and became truly immersed and involved into that program. I became such close friends with their representative, John Dorsey, and his family. He spent a lot of time here, we had a lot of conferences, study groups, and all kinds of things, established all kinds of programs across Georgia and the South. We had conferences in New Orleans, and everywhere. That was how I got into osteoporosis, then the National Osteoporosis Foundation. I received an award from them and at the time I was unable to go up there, it was somewhere up north, and my granddaughter went up there and received the award for me.
Michael Camp: 00:44:31 When you were on that train ride through northwest Georgia-

Nellie Duke: 00:44:35 Oh, we had eight different train rides. We had two in south Georgia, two in north Georgia, northwest, northeast, well, in different parts of the state. And there was one that went from Cordele to Americus and back, and we started in Plains. That was something the Carters took part in, too. I remember we were staying at the Windsor Hotel in Americus and they have a presidential suite on the top floor of that hotel for the Carters, so we saw them a lot while we were there. But in the park at Plains, we had a gathering, we had a high school band playing, and speakers, the mayor, and all that kind of stuff. I had a visitor from Canada, her name was Astrid Pregel. She was the ambassador. And I brought her with me and was going to allow her to bring greetings at this event.

Nellie Duke: 00:45:49 When we got there, the band started playing the Canadian National Anthem. She was blown away, she couldn’t believe it but somebody had told them that she was there, and they knew that, and they played it and she cried. It was so moving. She said, "I can’t believe down here in south Georgia that they know the Canadian National Anthem." But those were the kinds of things... Then we got on the train and we went over there and we rode all the way... We had, every time we had a train, we had anywhere from 200 to 350 people on it. It was sponsored by different organizations, especially pharmaceutical companies that provided osteoporosis medicines.

Michael Camp: 00:46:36 Those train rides coincided with another time in Georgia history, namely the debate about changing the state flag to remove-

Nellie Duke: 00:46:43 Oh, that was so funny. In 2000, we had a train that was going from Chattanooga to Summerville, it was this first train that this Mr. Mangum got for me. We left Chattanooga that morning, early, we had a load on there, including legislators, all kinds. We had hundreds of people. We were going across the mountains, and we had all kinds of problems getting across the mountains, but we were chased all the way by people waving rebel flags. They were dressed in rebel uniforms, they knew we were coming. Governor Barnes was scheduled to be on the train, but security had removed him from the train and said it wasn’t safe. Well, the lieutenant governor was on there, not Pierre Howard... I’m sorry. Oh my, one of my best friends, I can’t... I’m carried away with all of this talk. But anyway, he was standing on the back of the train and these people were chasing us, waving those rebel flags. We got up to, let’s see, it was LaFayette, I think, no Chickamauga, Chickamauga. There was a
high school band, everywhere we went bands and local people all greeted the train. It was a big deal, a really big deal.

Nellie Duke: 00:48:23 And at the museum up there the train was parked and we were having a gathering outside. I was introducing everybody. I said, "I want to thank all of you for coming to support osteoporosis, especially those of you who got all dressed up for osteoporosis." They started yelling, "That's not why we're here." Of course it was the day after the governor had signed the bill changing the state flag and they were protesting and waving the rebel flag. That was... it's kind of scary, but when I walked... when we got up to Summerville and I was walking to the... the FHA had fixed lunch for us and we were walking through the park. I was walking with the lieutenant governor and other people and these people were shaking their flag at us again and almost pushing me off the walkway. I finally had had enough of it. I stopped, I turned around, and I stomped my foot as only I can and I said, "Stop, you've done enough. Get out of here!" And you know what? It was like Moses parted the Red Sea, they took off. I didn't know I was so scary. But anyway, they left.

Michael Camp: 00:49:51 Some might call it effective, but yeah.

Nellie Duke: 00:49:57 Beg pardon?

Michael Camp: 00:49:57 Some might call it effective.

Nellie Duke: 00:49:57 I guess.

Michael Camp: 00:49:57 Yeah.

Nellie Duke: 00:49:57 But anyway, they left and that was over.

Michael Camp: 00:49:59 Yeah. So you've had quite a long career where you've been involved in many different things. If you to pick out one or two of your most significant or memorable accomplishments, what might you select?

Nellie Duke: 00:50:12 Well, my family is the number one, of course, I'm most proud of them. I don't know. I can't pick a signature event. There have been so many. I think when I was invited down to Miami to receive this award was a big deal. Working Mother Magazine and Fannie Mae Corporation gave me this diversity award in recognition of the work I had done to bring people together. I think that that's probably my most significant accomplishment. If I have created any change at all in that area, I'm very proud of that and I would like to continue that work. I'm still a member
of the NAACP, and the Commission on Women, and the Grandmothers for Peace. You know, it's so funny, we're named Grandmothers for Peace, but we protest, it's funny but that's a wonderful group. There are a number of things that I'm still doing.

Michael Camp:  00:51:32 The recent legislative sessions around the country have seen a renewed interest in the Equal Rights Amendment in places like Georgia, but also Virginia.

Nellie Duke:  00:51:42 Well, we only need one more state to ratify it. And it would be my greatest hope that Georgia would be that state, number thirty-eight. In fact, we have a group that we are calling “38 for Georgia.” The problem is that they're about to adjourn and maybe they did it today, let's hope so. It was being considered, we will see. But if that doesn't happen, it'll be next year. But we will sooner or later. If not Georgia, Virginia is very close to doing it, but I wanted Georgia to be the one. Oh my, you asked me about some of the things I thought was significant. I think some of the books I did might be. This is an award the Atlanta Dream gave me at the Phillips Arena one night for their game. Did I tell you that story?

Michael Camp:  00:52:51 I think so, but-

Nellie Duke:  00:52:52 Okay. Well, anyway, they called me a woman of inspiration, I inspired them to play so hard they won big time.

Michael Camp:  00:53:02 Could you talk about that a bit more for a second?

Nellie Duke:  00:53:06 What, about-

Michael Camp:  00:53:07 About the Atlanta Dream and how you inspired them to play better.

Nellie Duke:  00:53:10 Oh, that was fun. They gave a reception in my honor because women's professional basketball is not an old thing yet, and it's not really a big thing yet. It's still in progress. But I was instrumental in getting them started in Atlanta, they knew that. So whenever this was, 2008, they gave a reception at the Phillips Arena in my honor and they presented me with this. I was talking to them before the game when they were playing Seattle and I said, "All right, girls, if you're behind at the half I'm coming in." Well, in 2008 I would have been, what 79? And they looked at me in astonishment, "You're coming in?" I said, "Yes. I'm going to help you catch up. I'm going to come in and show you how to play." Well, the game started, they started off
scoring one right after the other. At half time the coach came over to me and said, "Nellie, I wish you would come every time and tell them that. They have never played that hard before." They had more than doubled the score. But anyway, I'm very proud of the Atlanta Dream plaque. I keep that in my bedroom. I have over a hundred things similar, but there are few that I think are kind of special.

Michael Camp: 00:54:48 Stand out, yeah.

Nellie Duke: 00:54:49 Now, this is a book I published while chair of the Commission on Women. I'm very proud of the fact that it says it's published by Nellie Dunaway Duke, it's called *Women and the Law: A Guide to Women's Legal Rights in Georgia*. And you know what inspired me to do this, that footnote. So, this is a guide to women's legal rights in Georgia. Now this is a folder of some things about the Equal Rights Amendment. And if it's all right I'd like to read it. What is the Equal Rights Amendment? Section one, equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex. Section two, Congress shall have power to enforce by appropriate legislation provisions of this article. Section three, the amendment shall take effect two years after ratification. And thirty-seven states have ratified, one more is needed and that's it.

Nellie Duke: 00:56:09 You know, it's interesting that recently I published this, it's called *Nellie Dunaway Duke: Poems, Prayers, Projects, and Presentations*. It has in it some of the speeches, two or three, like when I spoke to the troops at Fort Benning, when I spoke to commencement here, some prayers I did at opening of different women's conferences, and poems that I've written over the years beginning back in the '60s, I think. I have others, but those are the ones that are in here. And in addition to that, to benefit the osteoporosis initiative I published a book called *Bone Appetit*. Now, all of the recipes in here are supposed to be bone healthy and it includes my husband's favorite, which is banana pudding. Anyway, oh recently, let's see, I was invited to the city council meeting here and they presented me with the key to the city. Now, I have yet to find out what this unlocks. If any of you know. It says Carrollton, Georgia, can be unlocked with this key, so maybe I know how to unlock Carrollton, we'll see.

Nellie Duke: 00:57:37 Now, have we mentioned politics? One of the honors I got a couple of years ago, almost two years ago, I was named chair emeritus, that means you're out of here, I think, of the Carroll County Democratic Party and now I serve as an advisor. I attend the meetings, if I want to I can vote, but really I'm an advisor
more than anything else. But that was quite an honor to be named chair emeritus of the Carroll County Democratic committee. And I served on the state committee, of course, for many years. I've helped with some campaigns. I've probably hurt some campaigns, but I do what I do.

Michael Camp: 00:58:28 Speaking of politics, what are your thoughts on the recent #MeToo movement? Do you see any links between your-

Nellie Duke: 00:58:35 Oh, well, I'm glad to see women involved. I know back when I first got involved we'd have marches from here going through the square and everything, it was similar. They originated on this campus, they did. It was similar to that. No, I'm not a part of it because I am emeritus. If they ask me I give them advice, however, I support them in a way. I believe in what they're trying to do. Now, there are sometimes things happen that I would not do, but basically I approve and support everything they do.

Michael Camp: 00:59:27 What did you think of the recent beginning of the 116th Congress in Washington, which saw a record number of women entering the House of Representatives and the Senate?

Nellie Duke: 00:59:37 Well, I understand why they did it. I do, I really do. And some of my friends were there, we have the right to do that. I don't object to it and I think it was pretty... it drew the attention of the media and I think that's what they were trying to do. Some people across the country objected to it, while others supported it, so it depends on your view. You can either be for it, or you can be against it.

Michael Camp: 01:00:11 What did you think of so many women being elected in the last legislative cycle?

Nellie Duke: 01:00:16 Oh, I like that. You know I like that. I like that. I have been trying to get women to run back... oh, the first woman we had on the city council ran because I ask her to. I had made it possible that they'd have an election to divide the city into districts, it was all one thing, you know? One commissioner. And I went to federal court, I'd forgotten about that, I'm glad you brought that up, federal court and testified on behalf of the suit that the NAACP was bringing to divide the city into districts so that they would have a district in which they'd have a representative. Well, in the meantime, something happened and I was in the hospital, I don't recall why, but I was in the hospital and I was thinking, now who can we get to be in that district? So I got on the phone and I called Anne Shepherd. I said, "Anne, come over here to the hospital. I got to talk to you." She thought I was going to die
and was wanting to tell her goodbye, so she came running over there and she said, "Oh, what is it? What is it?" I said, "You've got to run for city council." "What? I can't do that!" I said, "Yes, you can." "Oh, but it costs too much money." I said, "I'll pay for it."

Nellie Duke:  01:01:43  My husband didn't know he was about to pay for it, but anyway, that's what happened. I said, "I'll pay your qualifying fee and everything." And she said, "Okay." Well, needless to say she not only was elected but she served sixteen years until she passed away. And now there are districts, of course, all over and there are women who run for some of them. Well, that same year I got a woman appointed to the hospital authority and the board of education. The woman I got appointed to the board of education was Helen Fay Lewis, whose husband was a professor here, John T. Lewis. She said, "I can't do that." John T. wouldn't like it. I said, "Don't worry, we'll take care of him." And he ended up letting her do it because he couldn't keep her from it. She was appointed and then she ran multiple times. She not only served, she became chair and then later chair of the entire state. That was a good choice, right? Women can do it. The wife of the president of this college, at the time I think it was called a college, a Mrs. Townsend, got appointed to the hospital authority. Ever since then we've had women in all directions, but that was my goal to get... and there was somebody else I can't remember right now. The same year we got them all appointed.

Michael Camp:  01:03:18  Great. Is there anything else you'd like to add to the historical record? Anything you think people should know about your life, your career-

Nellie Duke:  01:03:24  I think I've talked too much. I think you've run out of space and probably patience. But yeah, I've enjoyed it a lot. Thank you so much. I really have an affiliation with this institution. I feel like even though I didn't attend here and study here the fact that you all gave me an honorary doctorate and allowed me to speak, and I've participated in so many conferences, and now you've invited me out here to do this. Thank you so much. Thank you for all that you do, and you do a wonderful job.

Michael Camp:  01:04:01  Thank you. It's been great to hear your recollections and your thoughts about your place in Georgia history.

Nellie Duke:  01:04:05  I wish I could have remembered what you wanted to hear, we will see.

Michael Camp:  01:04:08  We got plenty. Yeah.
Nellie Duke: 01:04:09 Okay.

Michael Camp: 01:04:09 Thank you.