

Interview Summary Form

Arliss Sturgulewski

April 26, 2001

Interviewed by Karen Brewster

Born in Pleasant Valley, Washington in 1927. Had a twin brother. Grew up in a poor family. Father was a logger. Mother did lots to keep family going and was active in the community. She had been an English teacher and did plays in town. Mother died when Arliss was 10. Dad remarried a woman who had children already.

Dad told Arliss there was no need for her to go to college because girls should just get married and have children. She wanted to go to college. This may have made her want to go even more. Went to college in Washington and got an accounting degree.

Came to Alaska in 1952. Answered an ad in the newspaper from a couple driving to Alaska to homestead looking for someone to come along and help pay for gas and travel expenses. They drove up the Alcan Highway. Arliss had a cousin who was already living in Anchorage. It was a boomtime for Anchorage at that time. There were lots of jobs. She got a job as an accountant/business manager for a small company and then worked at Providence Hospital.

Arliss met her husband, Bernard "Sturg" Sturgulewski through a mutual friend and they got married in 1953. They had their son in 1957, which is when she stopped working. Her husband was killed in a plane crash in 1967. He worked for the Army Corps of Engineers. After he died, she was kept busy managing their personal finances and investments, which also helped her financially keep going without a working husband.

Eventually, Arliss got involved with the League of Women Voters. This led her to an interest in public policy and the idea that she could make a difference and change things. Because of her involvement, she started getting named to local boards and commissions. As got more involved and active, ran for Assembly. Had 2 terms on Anchorage Assembly and then decided to run for open State Senate seat in her district. Her son was grown by this time so didn't have to balance career and family so much.

Arliss was in the State Senate for 14 years (1978 - 1992). She ran for Governor in 1986. She got as far as being the Republican Nominee for Governor in that race, but lost the final election to Steve Cowper. Ran for Governor again in 1990 on the Republican ticket, and had Jack Coghill as Lt. Governor. Coghill defected at the last minute to join Wally Hickel as Independent Party candidates. They won the election. In the Senate, Arliss was involved with inflation proofing the Permanent Fund, and the Community and Rural Affairs Committee which took her to rural Alaska for hearings. These travels showed her so much more of the state than otherwise would have been exposed to. She was in the Republican Party, but says she never played the political games. Believes in coming together to work on a problem/issue, no matter

what party you're from. A strong supporter of bipartisanship. Not a strict Republican. Believes in crossing party lines which is maybe why lost the Governor's races. She commented on bipartisanship and how things have moved away from that in the more recent State legislatures.

Now Arliss is involved with the Rural Governance Commission and Bringing Alaskans Together, a group working on healing the rural/urban division in the State. She's on the board of Sheldon Jackson College and does other non-profit work. She has a strong interest in education. And is still asked to do a lot of public speaking.

Arliss is a strong woman. She says you have to make yourself known, don't wait to be asked. She says it's important to know yourself, to have a strong self-identity and self-confidence. You have to like yourself. Don't care what others think. She has a strong belief in the value of public service. She feels a responsibility to give something back.

She says women have come a long way since her first days in politics. Now there are women on these boards and in these positions, that didn't used to be there. But, there still aren't enough.

Arliss relaxes by reading, and she likes to travel. She enjoys nature. She finds solace in nature. She finds it calming and peaceful.

She wants to be remembered as someone of good, ethical character who was honest and who made some changes.

She told some stories from her time in the Senate when she and Betty Fahrenkamp were the only women about men behaving badly. Being rude, telling dirty jokes, or using foul language. She got them to stop by doing it right back at them.

She is proud of herself and her role in making a difference. She has a strong presence in the room. She is proud of her family, of her son.

She talked about how she dealt with the pain of losing her husband. How there is a private and a public face you put on.

She thinks her mother inspired her. She showed her that the world had possibilities for her.