

CARMEN W. COMBS  
Interviewed at her home  
1500 Circle Drive, San Marino, CA  
by Elizabeth McBroom  
August 14, 1990

Carmen Combs, interviewed by Professor Emerita of Social Work (USC) Elizabeth McBroom, was an attorney who spent a number of years as a referee in the Juvenile Court of Los Angeles. She also was an active volunteer in various committees and organizations that focused on juvenile justice and related issues. Among her activities was work with the legal Aid Society, Los Angeles; the University of Southern California Center on Law and Poverty; the Governor's (Warren) Committee on Juvenile Justice; the League of Women Voters; and the Boys' and Girls' Republic. This interview describes some of her activities in these organizations.

MCBROOM: Carmen Combs is being interviewed today, August 14, 1990, at her home on Circle Drive in San Marino, where she has lived for 51 years. We're going to talk about her long career in public service in this community, especially to children. I'm Elizabeth McBroom, and I'm interviewing Carmen.

I think you said you have done another oral history.

COMBS: No, I have not.

MCBROOM: We want to know about how you came into your career in law. But you have given us your lovely book, published a year or so ago called *Short Tales from a Long Life*. I think it would be very interesting just to hear what it was like growing up in Iowa in the early years of the century as the daughter of a country doctor there.

COMBS: Well, it was a great place in which to grow up. I used to roller skate all around the pond. That was one of my favorite activities. Then we would bob sled in the winter time on the snowy hills. That was great fun. We had what they called the dam, which was a reservoir outside of the city, which really was produced by a big lake. We used to go there in the summer time and go swimming. So we had a well-rounded life. Of course the highlight of the season was the hour

in Chataqua, which I describe in my book. It was staged in our big town park after the farmers had done their harvesting. Several of the families would come in and pitch tents at the park. I remember we had outstanding speakers like Elise Sundee and William S. Clark, and they used to stay at our house frequently, because Mother used to like to entertain them. They would stay with us. Those days were horse and buggy days, so we would go to the Chataqua, and my father, being a country doctor, always had a stable of good horses that we could both ride and hitch to a buggy.

I certainly feel that I was very fortunate in being able to grow up in a small town in the Middle West at that time in our history. Most of the - many, many of the youngsters in the high schools in Arlington went on to college. The rural Iowa communities were very big on education in those days. Both my father and mother were college graduates. Father was president of the bank, and he handed me a checkbook when I went away to school the first time. He said, "I brought you up to be frugal, and I'm just giving you the checkbook. Whenever you need money, you just write a check, because I have perfect faith that you won't abuse this privilege." Of course, with that kind of trust and admonition, I was very frugal when I went away to school. I went to school as father said, "You can go as long as you want to as long as you're getting good grades." Both my brother and I took him up on this. My brother went eight years to college, and so did I. One reason I kept on going to college was because I enjoyed it. I had such a good time when I was in college. I loved the dating and the social life and the companionship. As a matter of fact, the reason I went into law school was because the boy that I was going with at that time was in law school, and he urged me to come back into law school. I did so, first at the University of Wisconsin and then, because my brother graduated from Yale Law School and urged me to come back to Yale, saying that it was the best school in the United States that gave a law degree to a woman. I went back to Yale and took my LLB at Yale Law School. That was way back in 1927,

I guess. I've had a long and interesting, varied life.

MCBROOM: You certainly have. First then, did you practice law here?

COMBS: Yes. People said, "Wasn't it difficult to be a woman lawyer at that time?" I said, "No, indeed, it was really a great asset." Plus, with a law degree, I had no trouble getting a job. I worked first with Willis I. Morrison, who represented the Automobile Club of Southern California. We did nothing but negligence law. I stayed there for a little over a year. Then a firm in Pasadena offered me a raise in salary, so I moved from Los Angeles to Pasadena and practiced law with Crooks and Evans, a firm that was what was then the First Trust and Savings Bank. Of course, like so many banks, it's been taken over by the Japanese, and now it is - I don't know how you pronounce it - S A N W A.....

MCBROOM: Sanwa.

COMBS: Sanwa Bank. I stayed with them for a little over a year and married one of the young lawyers in the firm. When I found that I was about to become a mother, I quit for a while and went back on a volunteer basis at the Legal Aid Clinic at USC. When I first returned to work, I was head of the domestic relations department, and I worked on a volunteer basis with USC for several years.

MCBROOM: Was all of the work with legal aid on a volunteer basis?

COMBS: No. I was privileged to take certain cases, if I wished to do so, and litigate them. We just gave advice at the legal aid clinic. Sometimes it was necessary to go to court for litigation, and I was privileged then. It was almost all domestic relations work.

MCBROOM: You became head of the domestic relations department.

COMBS: I was head of the domestic relations department at the legal aid clinic at that time.

MCBROOM: You tell in your book about some of the Oakie families that you helped there.

Tell us about one of those.

COMBS: That was really when I was - one day, I went down to the Juvenile Court, and one of the women whom I knew, Doris Shaw Hefner, was a dear friend of mine, and she said, "Carmen, I can't come back tomorrow. Won't you take my calendar?" I had said, "Oh, I couldn't do that." She said, "Oh, yes, you can." She talked me into coming into the Juvenile Court, and because at that time I had children, I asked to be permitted to come on an "as needed" basis. Whenever I was free from my home duty, I would volunteer to work at the Juvenile Court. Not on a volunteer basis, but on a regular "as needed" basis. I did that for a period of several years. That was a time when I worked on my courtroom tales, in which I tell what I think were some amusing episodes that occurred while I was there.

MCBROOM: Give us kind of a flavor of the people who came through.

COMBS: One of the ones I describe in my book was this Oakie family, and the schools had filed on this family on behalf of the children. In the Juvenile Courts, you have both dependency cases, which is neglect of children by parents who haven't taken care of them, and you have the delinquent children who have violated one of the laws of the land. This was a dependency case, and the schools had filed on these children because they came to school in such deplorable shape. They wore ragged clothes and had sores and were unwashed and unkempt. When this family came before me, they looked just like something out of *Grapes of Wrath*. They were really typical. The mother of the family had a lisp. At that time, on a delinquency case, you had a probation report, and on the dependency cases, the social welfare department submitted a report. So you knew all about the case before it came before you. I was reading this report. I came to a statement that just simply gave me pause. It showed that she had spent some of the welfare money that she had, for a quart of whiskey. So I said, "How in the world could you possibly have spent money for whiskey when your children were in need of food and clothing, and there was such a dire need in your

family, and here you have spent what little money you had, on whiskey?" She looked at for a minute, and she said, "But lady, it was my birthday." That really bowled me over. I had a very difficult time containing my straight face as I went on to try to plan with her for her children.

MCBROOM: That's a great story. She still needed something for herself and her own celebration.

COMBS: Right.

MCBROOM: Then you did become a referee in the Juvenile Courts?

COMBS: Well, for a period of over thirty years, whenever I had any time available, which was quite often, I would report in and let them know I was free to sit in a court. They would say, "Please come over." We had a branch court in Santa Monica and Long Beach, and I'd drive out to Santa Monica and sit in a Santa Monica Juvenile Court sometimes, and I'd drive to Long Beach.

MCBROOM: Was that on a volunteer basis?

COMBS: Oh, no, I was paid all the time that I worked in the courts on an "as needed" basis. I was paid whatever salary was the going salary at that time.

MCBROOM: What do you recall from those years as a referee in the Juvenile Court?

COMBS: I was very fond of kids; I liked kids. I could almost always understand how they got into the trouble that they got into. I was probably more tolerant of the children than I was of the parents. But I could even understand the problems in those days. It was during the Depression when it was very difficult for the poor people in the County to make ends meet and care for their children. I felt for the families. I was sympathetic. I got many, many letters from parents when they got home, which was very gratifying, because you can sit down and try to talk to them and make them understand. I tried to do that. But at the same time, if their children were being neglected, we frequently had to put them in foster homes. Whenever we could, we would work

with the parents and try to get them able to be fit parents and return them if we possibly could. I think the Juvenile Court is run on the same principle today as it was run in those times.

MCBROOM: The parents coming into Juvenile Court did in fact care about them.

COMBS: That's right. And they had the Girl's Court and the Boy's Court. I sat in both.

When I was needed in the Girl's Court, I would sit there for a while. When I was needed in the Boy's Court - the girls were usually there during the - more dependency cases than delinquent cases. We had some shoplifting, but not a great deal. I heard some of the cases on the Watts Riot (1965), which are now in the press again on an anniversary. The kids have grown up that were involved, and were talking about it. I find it very interesting to read about it.

MCBROOM: You saw the young people involved in the riots coming towards you?

COMBS: Yes, indeed they did. Yes they did. I remember one episode during the Watts Riot. It was a boy. He was describing what had happened, and he said, "There was some shooting going on and there was all this yelling and everything. I saw a girl lying face down on the street. I went over and lifted up her face by her hair, but I saw she wasn't one of our gang, so I just left here there." He demonstrated how he left her there by dropping her face back on the pavement.

MCBROOM: What was the disposition of some of those young people that had been involved?

COMBS: Well, we had a number of programs we could offer. We could put the dependent children in foster homes which we had available at that time. The Catholics ran a school for the girls where we could send them, where they lived and went to school.

MCBROOM: Was that the House of the Good Shepard?

COMBS: Yes, yes, that was the House of the Good Shepard. Then we had, for the boys - I thought the outstanding one was Boy's Republic in Chino, which has been in operation for lo these many years. As a result of my feeling that they did such a marvelous job for only boys at that time,

I went on the board of the Boy's Republic, and I still remain an emeritus member of the board. I suspect that I've been sitting on it for fifty years. We could send the boys to Boy's Republic. That was one of the schools. We had several other schools and institutions where we could send them. Of course Boy's Republic is now becoming Boy's and Girl's Republic. So their programs are working, and they have such a variety of programs. They have the one at the institution and the one in Monrovia, where the kids live at home, and they bring them down to the residence each day. The parents do. Or, they pick them up and go back and live at home. They work with the parents and with the kids. The object is to try - the youngsters are going back to their community. So the closer you can keep them to the community while you're trying to help them, the better chance they have of making it when they go back.

MCBROOM: McClaren has developed a great deal more programs to be more helpful.

COMBS: Yes, oh yes. We detained them. We have our detention hold at McClaren Hall and at the home for the dependent kids and the delinquent kids right at Juvenile Court on Eastlake Street. If they feel the youngsters cannot be kept at home, or in lieu of sending a boy into jail, we try to detain them at Juvenile Hall until the time of trial. Sometimes we have to detain them until a program can be made, after they had their hearing. We don't call it trial - excuse me - we call it hearing.

MCBROOM: Would you tell about the city's advisory committee to which Governor Warren appointed you?

COMBS: Governor Warren set up what he called his State Advisory Committee on Children and Youth.

MCBROOM: How did he happen to do that? Do you know?

COMBS: Oh, Governor Warren was always interested in youngsters and kids. Carl Holton

headed our probation department at that time, and he was another very bright, studious, intellectual kind of a person. He and Governor Warren had much in common. Governor Warren set up this committee made up of the heads of all the state departments that had anything to do with children. Then he put some other lay people on the board: the head of the PTA, and he asked me to sit on his committee. We made studies. He would give us staff to help us, and we would study. I headed one study called "The Older Girl Offender and the Law." We studied the programs which were available to the girls and what kind of a census was most prevalent. Viv Stality was responsible for any number of studies and improvements. The Youth Authority grew out of the discussions, which is the program, of course, at the state level, for the boy and the girl offenders who ordinarily, if they were adults, would have been sent to jail. Instead, they're committed to the Youth Authority, which is an open facility, and the girls are committed to the Ventura School for Girls. This same program was continued under Governor Brown.

MCBROOM: And Goodwin Knight?

COMBS: Yes, Goodwin Knight continued it. I sat on the committee under three governors. We met in Sacramento, usually on almost a monthly basis, during the winter months. I think it was an excellent idea, and so did the governors. I have no idea whether or not the present administration has any such program or not. I doubt it.

MCBROOM: You were aware at that time of the very long caring interest at the top of the state government regarding children and youth.

COMBS: I feel that the three governors that had the youth committee were very concerned. Of all the governors, it seemed to me that the really most dedicated one was Governor Warren.

MCBROOM: He was the initiator of all that.

COMBS: He was the initiator of this kind of a program.

MCBROOM: You have also had a long career in the League of Women Voters. Can you say something about that. You organized one of those chapters in the Pasadena area?

COMBS: Yes, yes, yes. The League of Women Voters has always been my great interest. Many years ago - do you know what year we were first started? I forgot, but it must have been about fifty years ago. There was a girl living in San Marino - or a woman, called Isabel Andrews, and she had been a League member in Berkeley. She was a friend of mine, and she said, "My goodness! Why don't we have a League of Women voters in Pasadena and San Marino?" I said, "I don't know. But it seems to me it's a community that would lend itself to having such an organization." So we went to work and picked out about seven women that we thought would be interested, and we started the Pasadena League of Women Voters, which has become the Pasadena Area League of Women Voters, including the surrounding cities. That must have been over fifty years ago, and I have remained interested in the League. I've been officer in all of the positions in the League and am still today, working on a study right now for the League of Women Voters.

MCBROOM: What's your current study?

COMBS: An update on housing in Pasadena. In 1979, we had a committee of women that studied, in depth, the problems of housing in Pasadena and the surrounding areas. We produced a written study on it in great detail, going to all the authorities and agencies in the senior homes that had any interest at all in housing. I headed that study, and I called it "The Superb Document" because I thought it was. Now, as of today, there have been several meetings through the years on housing. The League takes a position on anything such as this that they are interested in. We have a position on housing, and a committee now is looking at that position to decide whether or not it is appropriate for the present-day problems on housing and homelessness. I sit on that committee.

MCBROOM: I think you once presented something from the League to a Joint Legislative Session?

COMBS: Oh, yes. When you went into the League in those early days, when I did, I was the State's Chairman of Social Welfare. You inherited what they called, "continuing responsibilities." This was something that they had worked on, and they were still working on when I became chairman. Well, among the continuing responsibilities was one which said that we should have a permit system for street-trade boys. In those days, the youngsters, the boys, sold newspapers. They would stand at the busy intersections selling newspapers. Several of them had been injured. So we, in the League, were trying to get a permit system in which the boy would have to be satisfactorily going to school and getting satisfactory grades and have to be physically able to undertake this job. We drafted legislation to this effect. It created quite an interest all through the state. We introduced this legislation all through the legislature, and I argued it before the committee, the appropriate committee, and the committee voted due pass. Well then it came before the whole legislature, and the California Publisher's Association became very upset. They thought this would ruin their business. They started building up opposing forces. When it came before the legislature as a whole, they asked if I would please present the League's position on the League's legislation to the legislature as a whole. Sure enough, they convened - the legislature - and I told them about the bill and why we were pushing it, and it was quite an experience. We did not get the measure passed because I decided that every man in the State Legislature - and they were mostly men - used to be a newsboy. Anyway, also the California Publisher's Association organized their forces tremendously, and they had more clout than the League of Women Voters at that time. They asked me if I would come down and address their annual meeting in Santa Barbara. I said, "Sure." They were very gracious, and I addressed the whole meeting, and they

were very kind to me. They didn't agree with me, of course, but they were very kind to me. But the Pasadena Star News was one of our ardent boosters, believe it or not. I forget who the editor-in-chief was. I should know. He was one of my dear friends. He was all for it.

MCBROOM: Was it Fred somebody? Fred.....

COMBS: No.

MCBROOM: No.

COMBS: No. I'll turn it over to my subconscious. Theo Blair.

MCBROOM: Theo Blair?

COMBS: Yes. Theo was the one who thought it was a good idea.

MCBROOM: What do you think of the achievements of the League of Women Voters?

COMBS: I think they're a splendid organization, and what they do is just absolutely essential. Their present push is for voter registration, trying to see if we can improve the voting average around the country. That's a very important thing. We supply speakers at all election times, and I think that nationally, they debate, and have been put on the air. I had to speak once on a "Town Meeting on the Air." It was a national television program. Guess what the question was? You would never guess. "Should sex education be taught at public schools?" Of course, I was taking the affirmative, and insisted that they call it "family planning" instead of "sex education." But my, that was a long time ago.

MCBROOM: This struggle is more or less still going on.

COMBS: Yes, it is.

MCBROOM: Yes, it still hasn't been settled.

COMBS: Of course, we in Pasadena, had the Galgoon affair where our Superintendent of Schools was in such contention, and we set up a committee called "The Committee on Public

Education” or COPE, and tried to support him and defend him. We managed to do it pretty well.

MCBROOM: What was that?

COMBS: I think it had something to do with sex education.

MCBROOM: Was it groups who tried to get him out because he favored sex education?

COMBS: He was considered too liberal. It was - let’s see - Pro-America was the organization that at that time was very conservative, what they would call a “far right” organization now. They attempted to have him ousted, and many of them were League members, but it was not a League organization. It was called COPE that we set up. We had some outstanding people from Pasadena that became members of it, and managed to keep him. But he retired of his own free will.

MCBROOM: Do you think that you prevailed in this?

COMBS: It was so long ago that I forget, but I remember that they didn’t succeed in ousting him, but I think what he did is he became so uncomfortable, he resigned. That may not be true, because, I guess I waged so many battles in my life, I can’t remember. It must have been a successful culmination, or I would have remembered that.

I was sitting in the library one day, saying, “Who in the world shall we put up for the Board of Education?” Ted said, “Why don’t I get the Cal Tech directory?” So he got the Cal Tech directory, and we picked the next Board of Education member, and he was from the Cal Tech directory.

MCBROOM: Who was that?

COMBS: Dougherty, I think was his name.

MCBROOM: Now, you were also on the Grand Jury.....

COMBS: I sat on the Grand Jury twice.

MCBROOM: Tell about your experience. And this was in.....?

COMBS: I sat in 1955, and they had a little unfinished business, but the time of year was over, and you sit for a year. You can't go back on the Grand Jury, at least, in those days you couldn't for ten years. So I waited for ten years, till 1966, and I went back on the Grand Jury. I was secretary of the 1956 Grand Jury, and I found it a very interesting and challenging assignment. What I really - we inspect the jails. That's one of the jobs of the Grand Jury, to look at the jails. We found teenage boys being detained in the County jails. I thought that was a very, very bad situation. I went back on the Grand Jury, and from the very beginning of the second time around, I started working on a program for getting the boys out of jail. As a result of that, they built Bizcaluze Center as a detention home for teenagers.

MCBROOM: This is the picture we have of you and the sheriff?

COMBS: Yes. I regret to say I have not followed whether they've taken it over for others than just teenagers. At the time it was built, it was built as a detention facility for just teenage boys. It was badly needed. I was helped in that by Sheriff Bizcaluze and it was called Bizcaluze Center.

MCBROOM: What other memories do you have of your Grand Jury times?

COMBS: One thing that I had, and it isn't a memory, but it's very worthwhile, and they have what is called the Past Grand Jury Association. I belong to that, and we meet very regularly and have a very active agenda in which we try to lend our weight for what we consider good, worthwhile cultures. I'm not an officer in it, but I'm a very active member and sit on some of the subcommittees of that organization.

MCBROOM: Does the Grand Jury convene primarily to investigate? Is that true?

COMBS: It has really two functions, or maybe more than that. They look at the programs for incarceration: the jails, the detention facilities. I was head of the Juvenile Justice Committee, and

we were particularly concerned with how the Juvenile Court was operating, and how the kids were being detained at Juvenile Hall and what programs we had to offer them, and so forth. They looked into all the County business. They'd have an audit committee.....

MCBROOM: You had a particular assignment, didn't you?

COMBS: I was always interested in whatever concerned young people. Any program that had to do with what we had available for helping youngsters, was always the thing I was most interested in. The District Attorney, at one time, set up a Youth Advisory Committee to the District Attorney's office, and I sat on that committee. I can't even remember which District Attorney it was. It was early on, probably back in about 1966 or so, and I thought it was a very worthwhile committee, because he was interested in what we had to say, and we were interested in the program that he had out of his office that concerned the youngsters.

MCBROOM: Could you say something about what organizations the Past Grand Jury Organization is concerned with currently?

COMBS: Well, what are they concerned with? Ruth Gevey, one of our League members, is a very active member in the Past Grand Jury Association, and she was doing a series of tv programs out at PCC (Pasadena Community College) that had to do with the problems of youth, and that was very worthwhile. They have various committees, and I'm at the moment - I can't remember what they do. They're concerned with the auditing of bookkeeping problems of the County and things like that, and what the Board of Supervisors problems are, and what they do. I have just been attending the meetings and haven't gotten involved except I'm on the Youth Conservation Committee now. We're just getting started to try to do something in the way of television programs that are helpful.

MCBROOM: Is this activity in the County budget?

COMBS: Yes, oh yes, they look at the County budget, and they still have a Juvenile Justice Committee. They're interested in what program we have for young people.

MCBROOM: Were you, as an active member of the Grand Jury, particularly concerned with the Juvenile Justice Committee.

COMBS: Yes, they had a Juvenile Justice Committee, and I headed it on the 1956 Grand Jury. In 1956 I was secretary, so I had something to do on each of the committees I served on.

MCBROOM: Did you come up with any particular findings on juvenile justice at that time?

COMBS: The only one, as I said, the second ????? part we came up with was the necessity of another program to detain juvenile boys.

MCBROOM: Now, you've gotten a great many awards. Would you tell about your YW Award?

COMBS: That was - what do they call it?

MCBROOM: Was it the Second Century?

COMBS: Second Century Award. The YW in Pasadena does this each year. They pick out, I think it is four or five women, and make them what they call "The Woman of the Year." One year, they were kind enough to select me as one of the "Women of the Year," and I forget which year it was.

MCBROOM: It's been quite recently.

COMBS: It's been several years ago. They have a luncheon. The one we had was at Brookside. Your family come and all of the town dignitaries are there, and they just present this award to you and ask you to make a few remarks. In my book I tell about what happened when I was named "Woman of the Year." Bernice Zellerbach, who was then President and on the National Board of the League of Women Voters, and I chose to be my introducer, you might call it, was sitting beside

my son, Jim, and he said to her, “What are you going to say about Mom?” Bernice said, “Oh, I thought I’d tell them about her work in the Court and the Red Cross Speaker’s Bureau and what she had done locally in the League of Women Voters, and so forth.” Jim said, “Are you going to tell them that she can whistle through her teeth?” Bernice said, “I hadn’t planned to, but I will.” So she did, and when I got up to graciously smile and accept the award, why, the audience demanded that I demonstrate that I could whistle through my teeth. So there I stood up before all of the dignitaries and tried to look very dignified, and I let out a blast, just to demonstrate.

MCBROOM: You could do that whistle on the tape. What do you think?

COMBS: (Laughter) Maybe it will blast the tape.

MCBROOM: No, I don’t think so.

COMBS: - Loud whistle is heard here and laughter from McBroom.

MCBROOM: It’s one thing to describe it, but to actually hear it.....

COMBS: Let me tell you story of how I learned to do this. It happened way back. I had a small growth in my mouth. My father, who was a country doctor said, “There’s a good surgeon in a nearby town, so let’s go over and have him take it out.” This was a real, real disaster for me, because I had whistled - I couldn’t carry a tune. I was never very musical, so the only way I could be musical was to whistle. I had this little dog called Sport, and Sport and I would go around the streets of Allentown with me whistling. When I couldn’t whistle, this was a real disaster. I started experimenting to see if I couldn’t produce a whistle by some other way than puckering. It was the puckering for whistling that bothered me. I started, as I say, experimenting, and I found that if I roll my tongue around my upper teeth and make a little hole in the middle in the front and push the air out, it produced a whistle. I can’t whistle a tune, but I can certainly whistle a loud whistle. It has been a great ability all of my life since I learned to do it. I can call my children for

blocks around, and I would know that they would hear me, and it worked for them to come home. I could get them out of the swimming pool when other mothers were begging their children to get out. All I had to do was pucker up and they would say, “Oh, no, mother, no. I’ll get out.” When they were little children, it embarrassed them very much to have their mother whistling through her teeth.

MCBROOM: Embarrassment is a powerful tool.

COMBS: Yes indeed (laughter).

MCBROOM: You can call cabs.

COMBS: Oh, yes, I tell about stopping a cab on a rainy day in New York City to the chagrin of all the other people who were waiting there.

MCBROOM: It’s a powerful whistle. You have also served as a volunteer in the Pasadena Unified School District on the SERV Committee? Would you tell what that stands for and what you did in that capacity?

COMBS: I really didn’t do enough to even talk about it. They were just nice. I did win the award for the best essay submitted that year to their magazine. That was more a part of what caused them to give me the award. I did go to the schools and talk on juvenile delinquency

MCBROOM: This was the part of the organization that’s intended to help children who are beginning to be truant or disenchanted with school. Tell a little about what they do.

COMBS: I don’t remember doing anything very outstanding except that I would go to groups and talk about Juvenile Court and talk about what everybody else does: the importance of education to them. It never was a very intensive kind of a program. I was just surprised to get the award. I think it was more for what I did in the community - throughout the community - than it was for any particular program in the schools.

MCBROOM: A very important part of your life in retirement has been traveling. Would you like to say just a few words about that?

COMBS: My husband, Ted, loves to travel, and so do I. He is an excellent photographer, so he has over many thousand slides that he has collected and indexed. We show them from time to time at benefits.

MCBROOM: He shows the pictures, and you give the commentary?

COMBS: No, no. He gives the commentary, and I usually put in my ten cents' worth, trying to give it a light touch sometime along the line. We've really traveled the world. It's difficult to find a place we haven't been. We've been to China twice. We've traveled with the World Affairs Council on some of their trips. Our most recent trip was to Tunisia, and we went with the Historical Museum, the Los Angeles Historical Museum. It was a fascinating trip, climbing more Roman ruins than you can imagine. There's hundreds of them there. The people were friendly and interesting, and it's the playground of Spain and Germany and Italy. They have wonderful luxury hotels on the Mediterranean with beautiful rooms and good food.

MCBROOM: They go there to escape winter.

COMBS: They go there to escape winter. We made part of the trip by bus and part by land rover, so we went across the Sahara to various date farms and oasis. It was just one of the most interesting trips we've ever taken. However, the most interesting was Antarctica, which is a dream world of amazing floating white palaces like the Wizard of Oz.

MCBROOM: It was on the way back from that trip that your husband got the inspiration to start his book.

COMBS: Yes, yes.

MCBROOM: We've looked at a lot of things that you've done and your contribution to history

here in this area. Do you think some of the things that have happened here have had an impact statewide?

COMBS: That's a question I'd have to think quite a while about to really answer intelligently. I know it did when we had Governors Warren and Knight and Brown. I know we influenced studies and programs throughout the State. I don't know whether the League - I'm sure the time that I was Child Welfare Chairman, the League of Women Voters was having an influence statewide. We also had a program on migrant laborers and the fact that children were working in the fields rather than going to school - children of migrant laborers.

MCBROOM: Can you tell something about that?

COMBS: It was very interesting. I went up and down the State, talking to the various Leagues on the problems of migratory labor children. I don't think they have the children in the fields with the laborers like they used to, and I'm sure that it had a beneficial effect on the problem. I haven't been a part of that study since the days when we did it, and when we attempting to get the children out of the fields and into school. We managed to have an impact on it at the time, and I don't know whether that is still a problem or not.

MCBROOM: You just think the children are out of the field by this time and in child care or school?

COMBS: That, as I say, I don't know. I haven't looked into the problem, so I couldn't intelligently answer what the situation is now as far as migratory children are concerned.

MCBROOM: Speaking of child care, you were a working mother before that was the mode.

Would you tell about how you managed that in your own family?

COMBS: There were two reasons that I was able to do this. One was my mother and the other was my father. They lived right across the street from where I lived when I was working. They

simply took over the responsibilities. They were lovely people, and the children loved them. I'm a firm believer in what we called "nursery school" in those days, and we now call "child care." We had some very good ones. One was out of Blair High School in Pasadena. As soon as my children were three or four, Father would take them to what were child care centers, and we called them nursery schools, as I said. They learned to play with other children. They both came out just splendidly and are two beautiful adults. So something must have been right. I think that the early nursery school experience contributed to that. They loved it, they enjoyed going.

Whenever, however, they were ill, or there was anything special, and I was needed at home, that was my reason for serving on an as-needed basis.

MCBROOM: The kids came first.

COMBS: The kids always came first. Fortunately, they were very healthy, and there was rarely a time when I wasn't free to go if I was needed.

MCBROOM: Looking back - and you have been so closely associated with child welfare for so long - what do you think are some of the changes that you see now from when you started in the field?

COMBS: I think life is more complex, now, for kids, and we also have the homelessness on a scale that we never had in those days. If we had it, we certainly weren't aware of it. The world has become so much smaller, due to our instant tv awareness all over the world. The challenges that face our kids today are more sophisticated and probably more difficult than they were, certainly, when I was a child, and when I was working with children.

MCBROOM: You have described growing up in a community where you knew everyone and everyone knew you as a girl. I suppose very few children today have that experience.

COMBS: I doubt if very many do. Perhaps in some of the small towns in the middle west,

maybe some do, but I doubt it. I think religion played more of a role with children in those days than it does now. We have a few excellent religious programs in churches. I guess the Catholic Church, in the areas where children are living under very bad conditions, probably offers some kind of program and help.

I'm not really very active any longer in any of these things that we're talking about. I have a pat answer when I'm asked to do something, and that is, "I've paid my rent." This is my way of saying either that I've already read that book or had that job or something.

MCBROOM: What is "rent" in that context?

COMBS: "Rent" in the way I use it, is things that I've tried to do through the years to make this a better place in which to live; the responsibilities I've taken to try to improve, or at least study and make known - hopefully, improvement will result - some of the problems that young people have. It's been challenging and interesting, but I'm very concerned about the world right now.

MCBROOM: You mention in your book the role of happenstance, or luck, or bad luck, plays in making a young kid a delinquent. Please say something about this.

COMBS: It just speaks for itself. Some kids are at the wrong street corner at the wrong time, and getting caught, of course, is sometimes good luck for some of the kids.

MCBROOM: Kids that come through the system are essentially the kids that are caught.

COMBS: Yes, they're the ones that get caught. If our system is right, it will help rather than hinder a child in meeting the problems he has to meet. I miss my contact with children. I don't have any. My children are grown up and very adult, and my grandchildren are adult, also. I have only one great-grandchild that's less than a year old.

MCBROOM: The next generation is coming along.

COMBS: Right.

MCBROOM: You said about the kids that are caught and come into the system, “If it’s right, it will be a good thing for them.” What’s your estimate about the system right now?

COMBS: I’m probably not well enough informed to answer the question intelligently. The only way I see the system working and meet the young people that I’m meeting, is at Boy’s Republic. We’re doing an excellent job there.

MCBROOM: What are the auspices of Boy’s Republic?

COMBS: It’s just a privately-backed, privately funded.....

MCBROOM: They raise all their own funds?

COMBS: They raise their own - well, the County, of course, pays a per diem for the boys that are placed there by the Juvenile Courts, and most of them are. Sometimes parents put the children there without.....

MCBROOM: How is the selection made as to how a kid gets into an excellent program like this?

COMBS: The probation officer decides that or the social worker. Almost all there are boys that have been in trouble with the law. Sometimes it’s only as bad as truancy. I mean, that can be the problem that finally brings them if they can’t induce a kid to go to school. It’s the law that they go to school, so they have to file on them for truancy if the schools can’t induce them. We had a counseling service, and the Boy’s Republic has been asked to make it available to certain school systems, because they have a good reputation.....

MCBROOM: The public schools? As a type of a preventive measure?

COMBS: Yes, as a way of counseling with the parents and the kids, and no, it’s usually when there are problems, and they want some help with solving those problems, or the school wants.....

MCBROOM: But for kids that are still at home, or in public schools, as a way of getting.....

COMBS: Yes, or, in the Monrovia program, the kids live at home, but they’re brought each day

to the Center. We're just starting a school, a home, for girls, which delights me. In the years I've been on the Board, I've been screaming, "Let's do something for girls."

MCBROOM: Someone finally heard your screams.

COMBS: Yes, they finally heard my screaming, and they're doing something for girls.

MCBROOM: What has been your experience with probation officers over they years? How do they work?

COMBS: For the most part, they have good training and are well qualified. You don't go into work like that because of the money: you go into it because you're really interested in kids and their problems and their families. Almost always, they are fine, outstanding human beings, themselves. The only reward that they get is if they help somebody. The kind of person that dedicates themselves to that kind of job is usually a very outstanding, delightful, warm kind of person.

MCBROOM: Do you think the probation departments are supported enough to do enable them to do their best work in terms of caseload size?

COMBS: I can't answer that question intelligently, because I haven't been in touch with the probation department, intimately, like I was. It's been, gracious me, 1975 when I quit the Juvenile Court.

MCBROOM: Well, that's quite a while. At that time, did you think they had a fair chance to do what they could?

COMBS: I think so. Los Angeles Juvenile Court has always been an outstanding Court.

MCBROOM: You mentioned your great respect for Carl Holton, who kind of launched it and set some of the standards for the California Youth Authority.

COMBS: Yes, he did. I don't even know who the Chief Probation Officer is right now.

Heman Stark was very instrumental in setting up the Youth Authority and heading it for a number

of years. He also was an outstanding person. We've been blessed with very excellent leadership at both the County and the State level.

MCBROOM: We've had some very outstanding people, haven't we?

COMBS: Yes, we have indeed.

MCBROOM: Well, is there anything we haven't talked about that we should say in this interview?

COMBS: Let me think a minute. I asked myself, if I had it to do over again, would I have done things differently? I actually couldn't think of anything that I would have done differently. Of course, I went through a divorce that was not my idea, but it was understandable. It left no bitterness as far as my ex-husband and I are concerned, because I was bound and determined it wasn't going to hurt the kids. We just sat down and talked it over with them before he left. It was just one of those crazy things. It was war time, and a lonely, lonely woman, more beautiful than I, though not nearly as smart, I'm sure (laughter). Then I found Ken, who is my second husband. He is just wonderful.

MCBROOM: And your children have had a father?

COMBS: Oh, yes, always. Always. Right now they're trying to help their father through a very difficult time, physically. They're very devoted to him and very helpful. I think that's wonderful.

MCBROOM: It is wonderful. Well, thank you very much. Thank you for your patience.

COMBS: Thank you very much.