

**VIRGINIA WOMEN ATTORNEYS ASSOCIATION****ROANOKE CHAPTER****ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**ATTORNEY:** Diana Perkinson, Esquire

**INTERVIEW DATE:** June 27, 2023

**INTERVIEWER:** Sharon Chickering

**STENOGRAPHER:** Debra Ann Howard

**VIDEOGRAPHER:** Melissa Stephens

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** I'm Sharon Chickering, and the date is June 27, 2023. I am interviewing Diana M. Perkinson, one of the first women attorneys to practice in the Roanoke Valley of Virginia.

This interview is part of the Oral History Project of the Virginia Women Attorneys Association, Roanoke Chapter, recording the oral histories of the first women attorneys to practice in the 23rd Judicial Circuit of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

This interview is taking place in the offices of Woods Rogers Vandeventer & Black in Roanoke, Virginia. The stenographer is Debra Howard, and the videographer is Melissa Stephens. Diana, do I have your permission to record this interview?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** You do.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** All right. If you would, tell us a little bit about when and where you were born and your family and your childhood and upbringing.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I was born

April 13th, 1947 in Giles County. We lived in a small community called Green Valley on a family farm that my father and all of his siblings had been born and lived there. My grandfather had bought it. And actually all of the siblings lived there until each of the women married.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my goodness.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** He had four older sisters and then he was the next to the youngest. There were four girls and then three boys. I did not know those grandparents because they died while he was in the service, World War II.

But his philosophy, my grandfather's philosophy was, Number 1, the pastor needed to eat lunch at his house at least two or three times a month. And Number 2, that all of his daughters should be educated. Ahead of his time, he believed that they all -- so one was a teacher, one was a librarian, one was a nurse and one was a chemist, and he wanted his sons to either work on the farm or get public jobs to help his daughters be educated. That

seemed to be ahead of his time.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Very definitely.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** So I had that model. And then my mom was much younger than my dad and she grew up in a totally different family. She was the oldest of eight. And my grandfather, her father, was a finish carpenter with plenty of habits that weren't the best if you know what I mean. So I actually have an aunt and uncle, an aunt my age and an uncle younger than me on my mother's side.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** So actually my dad's oldest sister was the exact same age as my grandmother, my mother's mother, which made for a very interesting family.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Certainly.

**MS. DIANE PERKINSON:** And I think what was unique about my childhood was my father's siblings, none of them had children except one, so I had only one cousin. On my mother's side, most of the women, most of her sisters had eight or 10.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my goodness.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** So the fact that mom had only three was a joy for our family. So I grew up in that little small community and when I got ready to start school my dad's oldest sister was the librarian and she was the librarian in the elementary school in Pearisburg, so rather than go to the local school, it was agreed that I would ride with her, I would go to the Pearisburg school.

Anyway, I was the only child for 10 years, eight and a-half years, and then a brother was born, a surprise, and then another brother was born. So I was really fortunate. I was so excited. I went to church one Sunday and said "I got the best Christmas present ever," and my little friend said what was it, and I said a baby brother.

And they went, they all had several siblings, they did not think that was a good Christmas. But when I started school, I had only been around adults.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I mean that's all

you have in the country when you don't have siblings. And when the -- I loved school, I thought that was great, but when the teacher would leave the room and we were supposed to be on our little rugs.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I would get up and leave because I couldn't see how I could stay in a room with 25 kids without an adult. Until my aunts would catch me because one of them was a teacher and one was a librarian.

But I think I was lucky because there was, everyone thought reading was the best thing in the world, so every Saturday my dad would go grocery shopping and he would buy me a little Golden Book.

So I would read the books and then we would give them to my cousins who didn't have those books. This was the beginning of the baby boomers, born in '47.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And for the first time they had four classes of first graders and all the way through school.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Because they never had that many kids enrolled in this tiny little Macy Elementary in Pearisburg.

But that afforded the school system the ability to take the children who really might be able to be challenged a little bit more, and they didn't point it out to anybody, but we just got in classes where it was a little more challenging. They did that all through school, and I think that helped prepare someone coming from just an ordinary public school ready to go to college.

But like I said, when my brothers were born my mom said, they were so close together, they were only 18 months apart, when she came home with the second baby she said pick one. I'll take the baby, you haven't spoiled him yet.

But by 10 years old I was babysitting, I loved doing that. So I always thought working was a great thing.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So tell me a little bit about your educational background

once you got through public school.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Oh, I applied to -- it was clear I needed scholarships. My father was the -- my mom did not work outside the home, she was a homemaker.

And I was probably going to qualify for some academic scholarships, but I would need a lot of assistance, because I can remember the first time my father ever had a paycheck that was more than \$90.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my goodness.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Which, you know, we just thought when it was \$100, we just thought that was incredible. So I applied to several colleges. I applied to Radford, I applied to state schools, but I also applied to Randolph-Macon.

And my mom was concerned, she said this looks like the kids are wealthy there, and I said yes, ma'am, they are. She said but we don't have that kind of money for clothes and so forth. I said my blue jeans are going to be just fine, just like their blue jeans, because that was, basically we wore blue jeans



when we were in college. But I was lucky enough to get a Geven scholarship.

So from the time I entered Randolph-Macon until I finished it was a commitment that someone had made to make sure that whatever I needed financially, in addition to working, would be available.

And my job was a waitress. We ate, we all ate in our own dorms. We had dining rooms in every dorm. So that was a great job and other people would be willing to substitute for me because they got to eat first and they got to --

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Lots of advantages.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Yeah, yeah. So it was easy to get, to hire somebody to wait tables for me if I needed to be out of town or something.

But that was the best thing that could have happened because it was truly liberal arts, and that's exactly what I needed and wanted, and the professors were excellent. They all had office hours, you just walked

down the hall, knocked on the door and get to talk to your professors. The biggest class I had I think was 45. The rest of them were small.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Nice.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** So it was a very supportive place for all of us. But certainly it, there just didn't seem to be any distinction between the scholarship students and the -- my best friend in first year, her father happened to be vice president of U.S. Steel.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And it just didn't make much difference.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure. Sure.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Where you come from.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So this was in, you graduated in '69, is that right?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I did. Started in '65, graduated in '69.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay, and this was an all women's college?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Yes, in Lynchburg.

As a matter of fact, I'm so fortunate, when I got to Lynchburg, obviously there had been no integration of the, of the restaurants and the dining facilities, and there is a very, he is still living, very active African American minister there and he ran a funeral home, and he and the students at Randolph-Macon formed the sort of ad hoc committee and we sat in at the five and dime and ate meals there.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my goodness.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** We were really fortunate, the President of Randolph-Macon, you would have to say he was liberal, he believed that as long as we were not doing the wrong thing we should be able to do whatever we wanted.

So we were able to go to a trial, a very famous trial in Lynchburg, for a young man named Wansley, and I mention that because that's where I met Phil Hirshkop and another trial lawyer at that time, William Kunstler was a very famous lawyer, and at night, because they were representing him, he had

already been convicted of rape of a woman that lived on Rivermont Avenue where our college was located.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANE PERKINSON:** And he was a teenager and he did not, his attorney in the trial passed away, the Judge wouldn't give a continuance.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my goodness.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** It was -- apparently that trial was horrendous, but Phil Hirschkop had just been licensed as a lawyer.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** You know, he did the Loving case in Virginia for the ACLU, and of course William Kunstler was the head trial lawyer, and they were able to get it reversed. Judge Merhige reversed the decision and freed him eventually.

So he went from having the death sentence to having been convicted of two rapes to really being released.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** That's amazing.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** We were fortunate to be able to go down.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And the college didn't mind if we wanted to go down there. But it's funny because the Daily News, a very conservative newspaper in Lynchburg as you might imagine, and one day the editor walked up to me and said "what if I called your parents tonight and told them where you were," and I said they'd be really happy, why don't you give them a call. And he was, he just couldn't believe that anybody's parents wouldn't be upset about them being --

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** That's amazing.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Yeah. It was a different time. But, because of that, we were able to go that first year after first year of college to Atlanta, and meet Stokely Carmichael.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Julian Bond, I got to meet Reverend Martin Luther King. Just I guess it was the right time to be able to --

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** To meet people who were influential at that point, but.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So what was your area of study?

**MS. PERKINSON:** I went to college as a math major.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

**MS. DIANE PERKINSON:** Mary Sue Terry, who was our Attorney General at one point, and I and others, went in the summer to colleges for the National Science Foundation, they wanted students who were good at math and really liked math to go to college for two or three weeks and study.

So by the time I got to Randolph-Macon I was already at a level in math that I was put in a class with juniors, and my teacher was Korean, and I come from Giles County, we didn't have anyone like that.

And it was eight o'clock in the morning, and I'm not a morning person, so after about, pretty close to a semester, I said I can't do this, this is beyond, it was beyond interval

calculus at that point, and the Dean said I agree with you, transfer into philosophy, because you've had enough math.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my goodness.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** So I liked philosophy, and then I got involved in political science. So my goal was to be in the foreign service until I figured out about my third year in college that you're probably going to have to live in Washington until you get an assignment.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I was not going to live in Washington, D.C., so I started searching for a different career.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANE PERKINSON:** And at that point I had already met Frank Perkinson, he was involved in the democratic party and he was the YD, the Young Democratic President that year, and they'd come to the colleges and talk.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANE PERKINSON:** And the

republicans were very active at our college too, but. And then I met two professors at UVa, and I just thought maybe I want to go to law school. So I decided to apply to several law schools because, again, I was looking for a scholarship if possible, and I was fortunate that at UVa I was able to get a scholarship, and it was more affordable than any of the private schools. But interestingly enough, I wrote to Washington and Lee for a catalog.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my goodness.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I thought that would be a great school to go to.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And they refused to send me a catalog, they were not accepting women. Two years later they accepted women. And Phil Hirschkop and I were still talking to each other and he said I'll sue them for you, I said, no, I want to pass the bar, I do not want to sue Washington and Lee. I want to be an example.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** I want a career.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** That's right. But



anyway, it was good to be at UVa because, as you know, the Vietnam war protests were going on.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And the law students, we all wore black armbands, and we were proud of the fact that none of our students who took over the Dean's office, they left at the end of the day, they didn't stay there at night and create problems, so we tried to help them stay just inside the law so they didn't wind up being arrested.

So we were out there in that regard. But there were, let's see, 18 women who enrolled the same year I did.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Interesting.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Out of 341. So we were five percent.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So you went from Randolph-Macon, an all women's college.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Uh-huh.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** To being a five percent minority in law school. How did that feel?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Oh it felt wonderful, because all the women students there at the time, and there were fewer students in the two upper grades, two and three, could meet in the women's lounge. It was the bathroom, but they had couches.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And comfortable chairs. And we were very close to each other so I didn't, I had one professor who was female at that time. Now before I left more women were hired. But it didn't seem unnatural at all.

Randolph-Macon you had to sign out if you were going someplace for the weekend, and UVa, as you can imagine, it was a totally different situation.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So I notice that you got your LLM, is that right?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** LLB.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** LLB. So tell me what the difference is between a JD and an LLB.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Well, actually the

LLB was the degree lawyers obtained until JD's became available, and Virginia didn't start out awarding JD's.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Isn't that interesting.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** So I had the option, and I wanted the old fashioned one, the one the, the lawyer of legal letters, so I got an LLB. Other people in my class got a JD.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Very interesting.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Yeah, and we even had some classes we could take on a pass/fail basis.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my goodness.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** In law school, yeah.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Pretty progressive for that time.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** It really was. I'm really fortunate. My job at UVa was assistant to Dean Paulson. He was the Dean of the law school and he wrote a criminal law

book.

As a matter of fact, it's one of the ones that was used at a lot of law schools, and he was revising it and editing it, and he said to me that I was probably the second best legal assistant he had ever had. And I couldn't be Number 1 because I insisted on going to class. I wouldn't miss class just to help him out, but.

And then Charlie Whitebread taught criminal procedure, and he was more of an actor than he was anything else, and so I came out of law school saying I'm definitely going to be a criminal lawyer.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh wow.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** So that's how I started.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Interesting. Very interesting.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** But at that point Frank and I had become engaged and we married in my last year of law school, and he has a, had a significant collection in civil, collection practice.

So I was in court a lot, but there were no public defenders so people came and hired lawyers for criminal cases. And I had court appointed cases, too, but that was a great experience.

I was interviewed by the Roanoker probably the second year after I got here, and I can remember saying things like, there are many innocent people in the jails. I just was dedicated.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Not as many as I thought, but there were.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So you came, you got your degree in '72?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Uh-huh.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** And were admitted to the bar in '72 and then --

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Seventy-three. February of '73.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Seventy-three, okay. And then you came directly to Roanoke?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I came to Roanoke in June, as soon as we finished law school, I

finished law school. And Frank also hired Jeff Krasnow, and we were associates.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Interesting.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** We basically were paid, Frank had a philosophy that the more you brought in, the more you should take home. So he figured out what our overhead should be and basically we got to take home what we had once we contributed our overhead.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Nice.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** The rest was ours. So I thought that was a pretty nice way to be an associate.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Absolutely. Absolutely.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Incentive.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure. So you started out doing collections and --

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Criminal law.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** And criminal law. Okay, well, take me forward from there.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Well, actually I had I considered to be a great deal of success in criminal law and it might have

been the novelty of being the only woman in private practice at the time, because when I got here Melba Pirkey had been licensed as an attorney.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** But she was working as a bankruptcy trustee and not actually in private practice, per se, at that point. And then soon afterwards, Anne Edenfield and other women got here.

But at the beginning it was, I was sort of a novelty, so that first summer the bar, I got, I became a member of the Roanoke bar immediately, and they said well, we have our stag picnic, and I said well, I can't go, and they go, yes, you can, you just can't bring your husband. I mean you weren't supposed to bring a spouse. So quickly they changed it from a stag picnic to lawyer only picnic. But that was funny.

And about that time as more women came to Roanoke we had our own little informal, we'd get together for lunch at least once a month, if not more, and that's how the Roanoke

Virginia Women's Attorney Association in Roanoke got started.

But we just shared information and told probably war stories about how some people didn't think we were really lawyers when we first got here.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Did you have that experience?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I did. I went to, because back then when judgments were entered, the clerk typed them into books, and then when they were paid you needed to go to the clerk's office as an attorney and write out the release and then get the clerk to acknowledge it.

So I did that in Rockbridge County, hadn't had any trouble before, and I marked all the books and I asked the clerk to come help me, and she screamed at me, she said you can't, I can't have secretaries making releases of judgments.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my gosh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And I was a little embarrassed and I said but I'm an attorney.



She said well, you're going to have to prove it.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my goodness.

**MS. DIANE PERKINSON:** I said well, all I can do is call Frank, so. I wasn't carrying a card at that point. So I called, I said Frank, will you please tell her that I'm a lawyer, and he goes ma'am, she took some of these judgments.

It was just funny. That's the only remarkable thing. She just couldn't believe that I had written in her book. She was very upset.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So how about clientele, how did they take having a woman attorney?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** It's really interesting when I got court appointed for criminal cases and I'd go to the jail which was in the municipal building is where our courts were at that time.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And the jail was obviously the fifth floor, and so if you

needed to go see somebody in jail you just took the elevator and you went to the jail. And I couldn't understand, I would explain my job to a criminal defendant and ask them what had happened, and then when we would get to the preliminary hearing I'm hearing a totally different story, and I realized I had to do something.

So I'm not proud of it, but I learned to speak their language, and I recall going into a jail cell one time and said you blanky-blanky-blanky-blank, if you don't tell me the truth, I'm not going to jail, you're going to jail.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh wow.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And this young African American reeled back and he told me the truth, it was so exciting, so I figured that you needed to, you know, be very clear because they were giving me the grandma's version.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right, right. And it's always frustrating when the police officer knows more than you do.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Yes, it is very frustrating. But I was really lucky when I was practicing here, you know, one of the things that's of interest is we had separate courts, we had Hustings court, which was criminal.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Judge Ballou, and that's where I spent a lot of my time. And we had chancery court which did all the divorces and all the chancery matters, and of course that was Judge Fellers, Stanford Fellers, and then we had circuit court which did accidents and other just civil matters, and that was Tom Fox, so you actually had to file something in one of three courts.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And have the headings right.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right, right.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** But I'll say one thing for Judge Fellers. To my knowledge he was only reversed one time in his entire career.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** But he had a red pencil, and so he taught us very quickly how to write up decrees in divorces because he would just red pencil it because he said you want to get it right, you don't want somebody to challenge this later on.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** And he is right about that.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** He was. He was very good.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** How did you feel you were received by the judges?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** The judges couldn't have been any kinder or nicer. Monk Davis in Franklin County, Judge Ballou in particular, he always wanted, much like Judge Weckstein, if you made an objection and he would rule on it, but then he said what is your authority for that, so it's much more of a, sort of like being back in law school.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right, right.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Which it really did help. If you were going to make

objections, you better have the right reason for that, but. So I thought the judges couldn't have been any kinder.

Now, Mary, who was Judge Hoback's secretary as they were called, now she's very protective active of Judge Hoback, and so I learned pretty quickly that Mary and I needed to be friends, otherwise you weren't going to see the judge.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** She's a gatekeeper.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And she was that way with male lawyers as well as female lawyers. But the clerk's office I'll have to say, if you were smart enough to go to the clerk's office in our local courts and just ask, they were very kind to suggest things you might want to try that might work, but.

And the members the bar, if they had been practicing 15 years or more couldn't have been kinder. There is a little maybe animosity sometimes among your contemporaries maybe, but not really. But the older lawyers couldn't have been any nicer to accommodating.

I was fortunate, I had a case, I was very nervous about it because it involved a partner at Woods Rogers, and so I went through the front door to see the partner, I had sued his client, it was a drug store for mis-filling a prescription, and Mr. Rogers, Sr. office was right there at the front, he called me in because he knew who I was, and we were talking and he said what brings you here, and I told him, and I said I'm really nervous because that's who I'm going to meet with, and he said if he gives you any trouble at all you come right back down here and we'll all meet together.

I thought that was so sweet. Of course I didn't need that, but it sure was a confidence booster.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure, sure. So tell me a little bit about how things changed in your practice. You kind of moved into the domestic area.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I did. Actually Frank had the philosophy that we were general practitioners and so when people came through

the door if, he said if you have the ability to handle the case, take it, and you'll learn a whole lot more.

So there was a lot of domestic that came through the door. And I enjoy doing that too. And that's where I had a lot of success really. Back then there was no court of appeals and in order to appeal something from the circuit court you wound up asking for a writ. You had to petition for an appeal.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And I petitioned for at least four or five and got them to accept the case and got reversals, so I was pretty happy.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** One of them was a local judge who had, I'll never forget, he went on the record to explain how he was going to rule in a custody case.

These parties, the mother and father had been separated for well over a year, and the husband had hired a private detective to investigate his wife and she could document

that he had beaten her twice while she was pregnant with their son.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And judge, our local judge believed that she likely committed adultery. A local lawyer had been at her home and the detective had said that, the private detective had said that he stayed all night, and he said yes, he testified, he said I did, I've fallen asleep a couple times on the couch, but there was no romantic relationship.

And the Judge said how can I award custody of this eight year old boy to a man whose twice beaten his wife while pregnant. On the other hand, how can I award custody to a woman who has clearly committed adultery. And I thought that was reversible error.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yeah.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And the Supreme Court said so too. And it was two years later that it got reversed and she got custody but, you know, that Judge was so kind, he even congratulated me on getting it reversed. So I thought that was nice on his part.



**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Very interesting. So obviously there were all male judges initially.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Right. Yes.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** And then Judge Strickland took the bench. So tell me, what is your thought about how things progressed that we got to the point where at least at some point we were able, I think it was '92, that we were able to, well, I guess she was, she had finished in '92.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Right. She actually was a year behind us in law school. We had a small group, study group.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And Art and I were in the same group and --

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Art was her husband.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Art Strickland, her husband, and she kept getting all the questions right when we were doing the studying at night. She was in history at that point, graduate history, and we were looking

around saying, Art, you know, she's just a natural for this. I know she thought about entering law school and she did and we were really proud of her because she was very capable in circuit court after having been in the district court.

And I really do think that we as a group of lawyers kind of fell down on the job because we haven't had another circuit judge, and other areas of the state have had multiple women, and I don't know why we haven't.

I knew that we've all said that we were ready to support other candidates, and I know I tried to encourage several lawyers that I think would just do an excellent job in circuit court.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** But it seemed like that they were freely supportive for juvenile court and, you know, at one point we had all but one.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right. Yes, yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Were women.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** And I was wrong, it was 2002 that she retired. So it's been over 20 years.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Right.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And I remember Judge Talevi, she started as a public defender, and the first time I ever heard her make a closing argument in a case, I was waiting for another case to be heard, and I was like she just quoted the U. S. Constitution, I'm so proud of her. Because I knew in practice with her father, Jack Ward.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And I once said to him, and we were friends, I said your daughter is so smart, you know, and he said yes, she's a lot better lawyer than I am. He recognized that.

But again, there are such capable women and I don't know why we haven't been able to get any more on the bench, but I think, certainly there is women in the Virginia Women's Attorney Association who are actually

actively holding the conferences to help women do what they need to do to be candidates for judgeships.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure, sure. So is there anybody in particular, a judge or other attorneys that you admired and felt you learned a lot from?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Absolutely. Again, Trabue, he and I practiced law together before he went on the bench, and I'll never forget, there was this, I sued a man and so he was the defendant in the case, and he went to Federal Court and sued Judge Trabue and myself, and I was young and panicking and I called and asked if I could speak to Judge Trabue, and he said will you calm down, we have the same carrier. Because he had represented --

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** -- professional liability carriers, so. And of course that was disposed of. But there were, Judge Ballou probably was a very influential judge. But I admired attorneys just for their ability.

I mean Bob, I mean Bill Poff, sometimes Frank and I would go out and get something to eat and then go back to the office because we had a philosophy we weren't going to take legal work home.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** You know, carry it home to the farm. And he and his wife Meg would be out having dinner and he would go back to Woods Rogers and work until 10 o'clock at night, he was -- and he associated Frank in some cases, he represented the company and Frank and I represented the union, Martinsville Nylon, and so we got to know him fairly well.

But he obviously was a brilliant lawyer and a workaholic, but I admired him.

(A recess was taken.)

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So were there any particular judges or fellow attorneys that you felt treated you differently due to your gender, whether positively or negatively?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Yes, and it was

almost exclusively positively. Sort of embarrassing when I would go to Franklin County, Andrew Davis, Sr.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Would say the esteemed lawyer from Roanoke is here and I think she should go first, Judge, and all the other lawyers were like ohh. But that was just his nature, as was Mr. Rogers, Sr., like I said when I came over here.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Couldn't have been any more cordial and really just welcoming.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And not in a way that says I didn't belong, in a way that, you know, come on, we're glad to have you as an attorney. I didn't receive, maybe somebody wanted to be negative, but I didn't perceive it so it wasn't a problem.

You know, really, I will say that being willing to say I don't know exactly how to do this or is this pleading correct in the beginning, probably is a lot better than some

lawyers attitudes that we've seen come in lately with I know it all.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes, yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Please help me.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes. So you and Frank continued to practice after you all divorced.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** We did. We married in 1972, we separated -- well, we were separated in '82, and we didn't divorce until one of us had to ask the other for a divorce. We already knew whoever asked was going to have to concede some property.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** So we outlasted each other, but sadly, I mean his fiancée was so, she just thought that maybe I was the reason that we weren't getting divorce, I said just tell him to ask me, it's not a problem, we'll do it tomorrow, and we did it fairly quickly at the end.

But we continued to practice law because I really liked doing appellate work and I'm fairly good at it, and he was, always was

involved in municipal government and did zoning and planning, and our practices were different.

And I admired him as an attorney and I felt like neither one of us wanted to shoot ourselves in the foot so we continued to practice together.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** That's nice.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Yeah.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So did John Molumphy --

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** John read law in our office. He was our computer programmer.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Because Frank had gotten a computer years before to handle the collection practice and it was one of the big main frame computers.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And so it had to be programmed, and John Molumphy was a programmer at the time and he was interested in the law. So he did his regular job at night and came to work every day. I think



that was the difference for John, he went everywhere we went, to every case, the interview, all the way through the trial.

And as a matter of fact, I represented a local credit union, a small loan company, Credit Way, and Legal Aid sued our client for violating the truth in lending law.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And we won it at the District Court and Legal Aid appealed it to the Fourth Circuit, and John was able to argue with me.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Nice.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** As one of the first cases that he argued after being licensed, but we were really proud of him because he did a great job on the bar because he had been studying and coming to work every day as though he was already a lawyer in a way.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes, yes.

**MS. DIANE PERKINSON:** He knew the ropes so to speak.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Well, and you

mentioned Jeff Krasnow. I had read in an interview with him by the newspaper I guess when he was getting ready to retire and he remembered very fondly that, you know, he felt he was mentored well when he was practicing with your firm.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** We had a good, Jeff and I were friends in law school, and the only reason he left, and we were glad that he left, was that he wanted to advertise, and Frank just felt real strongly, there were no lawyers advertising on TV at that time, and Frank just felt like that was somehow unseemly, and Jeff really did it well.

I mean I can remember his commercials with the chain saw and cutting the table in half, but because of that he went out on his own and -- yeah, as a matter of fact, I just was in Richmond for the 50, the lawyers who had been practicing for 50 years.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** For the ceremony, and they give you a very beautiful plaque by the way.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And of course other people tease and say the only thing you have to do is, Number 1, not die, and Number 2, not mess up your license to get there. But there were, informally it looks to me like there were probably 30 women who had continued to practice, but I was the only one who went.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** So they made a big deal. We have one woman who came to get her certificate. But it was nice to see a lot of my classmates.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Absolutely.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I hadn't seen for a while.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Absolutely. So what do you see in terms of the progress of how women attorneys have been accommodated by the courts related to having children and those sorts of things, do you see --

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I do.  
Judge Strickland is to be admired for the fact

that my relationship with Lloyd Marshall lasted about 29 years after Frank and I separated and eventually divorced, and he flew Woods Rogers, and she worked and was doing depositions in Bristol and all across the state right before her, each of her children were born.

Now she did take time off after the children, each child was born, but she worked extremely hard and under the tutelage of Bill Poff, so you worked pretty hard.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** But yes, I'm, I think the firms are now acknowledging that it is valuable to have, excuse me, to have women, and in order to have women, you have to let them have some flexibility.

And so I enjoy hearing Monica Monday speak about, you know, what the situation has been with the bigger firms. But I do think the bigger firms have acknowledged that you can be a very good lawyer and you can have periods of time in which you need to do less work and still contribute.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** To the overall part of the firm. So I'm glad to see they are not relegated to staying, that they have become partners now probably.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right. So tell me a little bit about your involvement with the bar association and the Women's Attorneys Association and those sorts of things and what do you think is the importance of being involved in that way?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** You know, I think the Women's Attorneys Association was a great idea, and I can remember, I can remember the members of the bar going that's not fair. We said we'll take your money, you can be a member, and several of them do come, they're not related to the women, but they have joined and so forth.

But I think it really did help, especially I'm going to say in the last, you know, as you mentioned, the employers, especially the big firms, were not as accommodating to women, and it was like

either/or.

Either you're going to be an attorney or you're going to be raising children, but it was hard for them to conceive of how they could do both. And I ran into that when I was applying for law school.

The University of Richmond said you're welcome to come but we're not going to give you a scholarship because you're probably going to be raising children.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my goodness.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** They said it out loud.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my gosh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I said, well, I can't come if I can't get a scholarship, so it's a problem.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Thank you.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Yeah, thank you for expressing it, but. No, I think things are changing. I'm really proud of the women statewide for continuing to have the programs that were valuable to all lawyers, and well received, but especially for coming up with

things to encourage women to have goals for the bench, and I think in federal court we seem to be doing fairly well.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** We do.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And I'm very proud of that. But we really do, I don't know what it's going to take, but we really do need to work on our circuit and general district benches, because women need to be rep -- people need to see others like them on the bench. I think that's very important for all kinds of reasons.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yeah, so we've got Judge Elizabeth Dillon in the Federal Court.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** We do.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** And Kai Memmer has just been selected to go through the process as well. I think that's progress.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** That is good progress.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** It is.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And I will say that I think a lot of our, at least my

experience, and federal judge's feel the same way, they are very anxious to get women locally.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And I don't know, I guess we're a pretty big bar in Roanoke. I've always enjoyed the bar activities and I've learned a lot. You know, the programs have been informative and I'm glad I was able to serve, you know, as a director at one point.

Because I think what you can contribute to community is, it's a part of, if you are educated and you have an ability and you can give back something that you know how to do, that that's what you should be doing.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** And you've done that with other civic organizations as well.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Yeah.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Tell me a little bit about that.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** My father served in World War II, and he was very clear that, as compared with the Red Cross and with the



Salvation Army, the Salvation Army took care of soldiers, they helped them contact home, they tried to get them home if they were losing a parent to death, and the Red Cross sold them coffee and sold them cigarettes.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And he just, he always thought the Salvation Army was where our family wanted to contribute.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** For our charitable dollars. So when I got to Roanoke and they ran the only domestic violence shelter west of I guess, Charlottesville I guess at that point, it was natural to want to serve there. So I was on that, we called it an advisory committee.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Because the Salvation Army of course has their own structure. But that to me, they do more with less. They don't pay their staff very much money.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And they do a lot of good, I think.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** In most areas, so that's been -- and then I had a special interest in mental health because over time in divorce work and representing children, you learn about the issues that parents and children have that create barriers to them and they wind up in court sometimes.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Based on that, mental health issues. And in the past, as Judge Trompeter has often said, people were embarrassed about having mental health problems, but they are no different than diabetes or an endocrinology problem or anything else, it's just part of the body that needs help.

So I was pleased to be able to refer kids who were in foster care to the program that Diane Kelly ran with Mental Health America and she convinced me to move forward and at one point I was president of the local

chapter.

But, you know, all of the agencies competing for dollars, there just wasn't any way to keep going forward, but we were able to transition the collaborative which provides free counseling.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Free psychiatric care from our fellows at Carilion, and free medication to people who have a mental health diagnosis. And that's now at Bradley, and they built a whole new wing.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** The Bradley Free Clinic.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Yes, they took it over. We gave them the money that we had left.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my goodness.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And they promised to do it and they've done a splendid job, because the doctors really support Bradley. And that support is translated into better conference rooms and better exam rooms for the counseling and so forth.

So I think the fact that one agency may go out of business, as long as some other agency locally picks it up, all is well.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right, right. So is there a particular case that stands out to you as a very special one?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** There are probably two or three. I mentioned the one about the divorce and the custody case, which the little boy, the little eight year old that I was speaking about, told his dad he wanted to live with him because he felt sure his mom could move mountains and he would not lose, his mom would not lose custody.

He was downhearted when he was awarded, his father was awarded custody, but of course in a couple years it got straightened out.

I represented an ex-wife of an attorney to challenge his discharge in bankruptcy. He was claiming that his postnuptial agreement, where he agreed to pay for the college education of the children, that's what she negotiated for. She didn't negotiate particularly for spousal support, but she

wanted their children to be educated, college educated.

And he, the bankruptcy judge said yes, that was in the nature of child support, and he appealed it to the Fourth Circuit and did not get his appeal in on time. And fortunately the bankruptcy judge had said to him, yes, the order has been entered, you endorse it, and Ms. Perkinson sent it in and sent you the cover letter and you could expect that it would be entered and your 10 days have expired and it's not excusable negligent.

So it pleased me for her that he was required to educate their children. And to have it nondischargeable, there was a lot of litigation at that time about what is and what is not dischargeable in bankruptcy.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Absolutely, yes, yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** But.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** You've done a whole lot of different types of law. I mean, you know, when you think about the breathe of that, and it is the solo, well, not the solo

practitioner.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Yes.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** But a general practice type of thing. And you pivoted more recently into guardian ad litem work.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I did.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Can you talk about that a little bit?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Sure. In 1992 the Supreme Court of Virginia said that all children who leave their home for abuse and neglect must have an attorney, a guardian ad litem.

And as you know, most -- not most, often children in custody cases, whether the parents were married or not, get a guardian ad litem if there is a disagreement between the parents about what's best in terms of the custody.

Now, usually with two good divorce practitioners, sometimes they don't want that extra expense for their clients of a guardian ad litem. But representing kids is, it's the reason I'm still practicing at this age. I get up every morning and I'm glad to go and do

the work that I get to do.

And people say, well, don't you hear horror stories and sad situations. Of course. But kids are so appreciative, when they realize someone is focusing on them, and it's subtle, but if you come to the house and thank them for letting you come and meet with them, they're thinking "I didn't let you come," but okay, maybe you do belong to me, maybe you don't belong to my parents.

But it's just, to me, helping parents come up with solutions that they can tolerate is the way I want to put it.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And I've had people come back to me, even divorce clients come back to me and say "I really didn't like you all when you said we'll fight about the money, we'll fight about the property, we will not fight about the kids."

Because, you know, I admitted he is an okay dad, and she said my children have actually thanked me now because I didn't demean their father or whatever. So I do

think you can take the high road sometimes.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Anything else in terms of your experiences that you want to talk about?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** My very first civil jury trial I represented, she was a widow, she was 60, I thought that was pretty old at the time, I don't think so now, and she had hired a roofer and he had told her he needed money for the materials, and I think he overestimated what the materials would be, and so he did nothing, he took the money and we couldn't get him to do anything, even after I started to represent her.

So I sued him in court and had a jury and they awarded her \$9,000, which was what another company said it would cost to have the roof done at that point, and she cried when the jury rendered their verdict.

She was so happy, she was, she didn't have much money at all, and I can remember there was a tear or two in one of the juror's eyes and it just made me feel good that juries I believe get it right more often than they



don't.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** We'll never know how they reach their conclusion.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** No, we don't, and sometimes we, you know, we wonder if they got information from outside the courtroom that rendered their decision, but.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Especially these days with a cellphone.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** You're right.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** So what are your thoughts about the fact that the Roanoke Bar Association for the first time since it was incorporated in 1925 has an all female board and all female officers?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I think it is fantastic. And last year, as you know, the officers, that was true too. I just can't say enough. I think that's -- it ought not to matter. We ought to fill any job for which we're interested and qualified, and I think in many respects we're coming to that.

I'm not saying that people may want to, well, people want a female doctor or a male

doctor, they want a female lawyer or they don't. But I really do think we're lucky that now the woman in our area are extremely capable and I think they should go right on the bench. That's what I think.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So overall what are your thoughts about you came to Roanoke in the mid seventies basically and just the general area and how we have progressed in Roanoke?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** When I got here, everyone knew the railroad was the biggest employer, and very quickly Carilion became. And we did represent a lot of the hospitals back then, the collection of accounts, and some of their leaders back then decided to bring in the best of the cancer doctors.

I remember when Doctor Rosenoff got here from New York, probably we remember him most now from running restaurants, but at the time he was quite an esteemed cancer doctor, but I think over time it's changed.

It's a shame that some of our communities in Roanoke were demolished so that

we could have the civic center and other things, but I do think that Roanoke has a lot of attractions, the natural beauty of it.

And people who have come here, I met a young lawyer who said that he came here to take the bar and then he was just like, gee, I think this would be a great place to live so he got a job and he said I think I'm going to stay here the rest of my life.

So there is something appealing I think about this area. We are certainly small enough that you don't have a huge commute. On the other hand, we have a lot of activities going on, especially outdoors.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** So.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So what do you consider other life accomplishments, both law related and otherwise?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Well, I used to raise and race horses and I enjoyed doing that, and then I realized that I was working and one horse would win money and then I would write the checks for the other horse.

So I pretty soon decided maybe if you want to raise horses you should sell them and not try to race them all, so that's what I did for years. I think we can, accomplishments, just to try to see things from another persons point of view.

I think over time, I'm told I'm a good listener, and sometimes that's what's needed. And I've been appointed once in a case to represent a parent that actually had had an excellent lawyer before, but she didn't trust her, and so I was, got a call and said I need you to represent this mother, and I said, I was in court that day, no, thank you.

He said I'm sorry, you don't understand, Judge Bounds says you're going to represent. Oh, okay, no problem. But we spent eight hours in my office, because she clearly thought that she should rent out her home and have her children camp up on the mountain.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh my goodness.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** She was not fulfilling her duties and so her children were in foster care. And that day we had, I'm sure

I offered her something to drink, but we did not stop for lunch or anything else, we went right through, and at the end I said is that everything you need to tell me.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And she said yes, and I said okay, we'll never speak of this again, because in court she would always start at the beginning and she would --

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yeah.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** She had a hard time --

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** -- addressing what was going on right now. She always wanted to sort of tell the story. So we got to court, I'll never forget, and I called her to the witness stand and I asked her a question and she started with the older, and then she looked at me and she said "and we will never speak of it again," and Judge Bounds was like (indicating).

So she did get her children back. She moved to Floyd, which was a very supportive

community, and she was able to accomplish what she needed to accomplish and recognized that her children needed a home, they did not need to camp, and so it pleased me that listening sometimes is what can help somebody then maybe do a better job in court.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes, yes. Well, you know, you truly have been a trailblazer, not only for woman in the law in Virginia and in particular in the Roanoke Valley. What are your observations of the progress or lack thereof of the equality of women attorneys in Virginia and elsewhere and women on the bench?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Did you say equality?

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** We do not reflect our population. We need, in my, in my expectations, as many women lawyers/judges, as there are in the population. They come to the law with all different kinds of backgrounds, but they have a distinct way of looking at things, we all know that, so do people of different races and cultures, and we're

certainly trying to appreciate that now in the Roanoke Valley.

We're fortunate that we've been a settling point for a lot of people who have come from other countries, so I really do think we just need to try as lawyers, and we're dependent on our legislators.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** That's the unique part of our judicial selection system. But I would hope that they would recognize that it is, the more inclusive we have from the judicial point of view, it just naturally is going to lift up citizens, period.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes. So do you have any message you want to give women just coming into the practice of law today?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I'm for whatever you want to do in your career because people before you have assumed that we should be accepted just on our ability and not anything to do with our gender or race and I think it's time for you to just aim high and hopefully the bar will support you.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** And what would you most like your legacy to be?

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** I think what you have from been able to accomplish, either one on one, or for people who needed a boost, that really should be the legacy.

I've been approached by a young boy that lived in my community in Boones Mill and he relayed a story that I had honestly forgotten about, that he clearly was a young man who was gay in his family of males and he was teased by his brothers and he said that I had said to him "one day your brothers are going to depend on you so just don't lose heart," and it turned out that he is a successful businessman.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** And a couple of his brothers have gotten in trouble and had to come to him for money or whatever. And he said it really meant a lot, and I didn't even know that I had said something that would help him as a child.

So I think if there are people who have



been helped along the way, that should be enough.

**MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Thank you for participating. This has been a lovely interview and I appreciate it.

**MS. DIANA PERKINSON:** Thank you so much.

(10:53 a.m.)

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