

Excerpt from Oral History Interview with Bobbi Fiedler

Interviewed by Robert Marshall for the Urban Archives General Oral History project in 1988, Fiedler started her political career in 1977 when she won a seat on the Los Angeles School Board in an anti-bussing campaign. In this clip she describes how bringing so many people together in a movement to oppose a government that tried to dictate where their children would attend school was one of her proudest achievements.

Transcript:

RM: So, in 1977 you won a seat on the School Board. How did that feel?

BF: It was really fantastic. The one thing that was sad, as a side note, was that my mother in the last month of the election, just before I was elected, had contracted terminal cancer and died just a couple of months thereafter. So, it was somewhat sad; shall I say, affected me. I was affected by that very strongly because she was very important to me. But besides from that which was a personal family tragedy, winning that election meant a lot because it wasn't something that I just won by myself. It's not like somebody goes out and they're going to have a career in politics, and they want to run for Congress, or the City Council or the School Board. It was something that I won as part of something that was much bigger than myself, as part of an entire movement. And as a result of that, a lot of people had gotten involved in the political arena, and I think that's the thing I am proudest of when I look back at that period of time in my life, that I brought many thousands and thousands of people into the political process who had been turned off by disappointing performances on the part of lots of politicians. And that was the first time a lot of American people had the privilege of having an impact that they never exercised that, other than, you know, going to the polls voting, realized that this system can work and work effectively, that you can make it do... [inaudible] ...the more you get involved. That's the whole difference between you prevailing and someone else.

RM: You mentioned earlier that you won by fifty-six to forty-four percent of the... across the whole board. Do you feel that that was somewhat of a mandate?

BF: Clearly. It was clearly a mandate and I must say, ironically, that I was, I think, most proud of the thirty percent that I got in the South-Central area. Because if you look at the elections, like Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, he was... or even, you know, '84 where he won forty-nine out of fifty states, he still only took eight or nine percent in that area [South-Central Los Angeles]. So, it was to me, a special vote of confidence that, not only did I get that, thirty percent of the vote, but that I also got a majority of the vote in the UCLA area which was heavily Hispanic, that I could win a majority of the minority vote, because that meant that I had convinced them that I was not a racist who had, you know, historically the anti-busing movement racists had left. And in this case, we had a different set of circumstances. And so, from a personal standpoint, those special things are accomplishments in knowing that my honest viewpoint had come through, regardless of the outrageous and sometimes vicious charges from my [opponent's] offices, who tried to cloud the issue with charges of racism but he fortunately did not succeed.

RM: Okay, we talked about your opposition from the School Board. Do you get any support or find it supportive after the election?

BF: In what sense do you mean? You mean, on the Board of Education?

RM: On the Board of Education.

BF: I made a dramatic impact on the Board from the time I first got there. I forced Kathleen Brown Rice, who had been very pro-busing, in the pro-busing majority, to become a moderate. My being on the Board had a big impact on another member of the Board, Philip Bardo, who became more conservative, because I basically took the lead, not by plan but by circumstance and strength of viewpoint and strength of political impact. And, yes, I had a big impact on the Board; and eventually we managed to take over the majority of it which eventually we lost and now they're talking again, here. It's been eleven or twelve years later about the possibility of busing again and ironically, I'm still involved in school. I have three beautiful grandchildren, as I mentioned earlier, and my eldest, who is now five, has just started school again. So, I have to worry about what is going to happen to him and whether this is going to be an issue that goes on, and on, and on and probably by the time these archives are long past ancient history, they'll still be talking about forced busing in our city or others throughout the country. [The door just flew open].