

**Oral History Interview of
Nelda Armstrong**

**Interviewed by: Elissa Stroman
July 31, 2015
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Women's History Initiative***

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The Women's History Initiative began formally in June 2015 with a concentrated effort to record the stories of prominent women from across the South Plains. The interviews target doctors, civic leaders, teachers, secretaries, and others whose stories would otherwise be lost.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Nelda Armstrong. Armstrong reflects upon the establishment of her own advertising agency, challenges she faced as a woman in business, and her involvement in various volunteer organizations and agencies.

Length of Interview: 01:19:26

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Elissa Stroman (ES):

Today's date is July 31, 2015. I am Elissa Stroman for the Southwest Collection, and I'm interviewing today, Nelda Armstrong at her home, but not for too much terribly longer here in Lubbock, Texas. I will start out and ask you to tell me your full name, like your maiden name and your full name.

Nelda Armstrong (NA):

Okay, Nelda Fay Ellison Armstrong.

ES:

Okay, and when and where were you born?

NA:

I was born December 28, 1935 in Gatesville, Texas.

ES:

What were your parents' names?

NA:

Juanita and Frank Ellison.

ES:

So tell me about your family growing up.

NA:

Well I was born in Gatesville, but we moved to Erath County, and we lived there. I have a sister that's three years younger than me, and she was born in Erath County. We lived there until I was ten. We lived on a farm, which was kind of weird. All the farmers were dryland farmers, starving, and we moved to Crosbyton when I was ten years old. So I grew up in Crosbyton and it just seemed like a totally different world in Crosbyton. It was so much more progressed beyond what Central Texas was that it was shocking. I'm really grateful that my dad took a chance and moved to Crosby County because it was so good. I graduated from high school in Crosby County, and I got married, and we moved to Lubbock, and I went to Draughon's Business College. And I married H. S. Armstrong from McAdoo, and after Draughon's Business College, we moved back to McAdoo to dryland farm; but once again, dryland farming didn't work, so we moved to Lubbock in 1960, and I have been here ever since.

ES:

Okay let me back up for a second. Your dad was a farmer, so was he just like—he would go wherever he could find land?

NA:

Oh no. I'm sorry. We owned land in McAdoo. So we owned the land in McAdoo and farmed our own land and then rented some other land. If it rained we had a good crop, but when it didn't rain, we had to go to town and get jobs.

ES:

And what kind of crops were y'all—?

NA:

Mostly cotton, some sorghum.

ES:

Tell me about this Draughon's Business College. Where was this?

NA:

That was here in Lubbock; that was the only business college we had in Lubbock, and so I went. I had my son—backing up a little bit, my son was born in 1954, so I had a child. When we moved to Lubbock, I went to Draughon's Business College half-a-day and worked half-a-day.

ES:

Okay, where did you work?

NA:

I worked at Hufstedler Truck Company, a very old Lubbock established family, and so I worked there until I got out of business school, and then we moved around. My husband got a job in Tulia; so we lived in Tulia for a while, and my oldest daughter was born in 1959. Then we moved to Plainview, and then in January of 1960 we ended up in Lubbock, and I got my first advertising job at Buckner Advertising, and I was the office manager and the secretary. That is how I got into advertising in January 1960.

ES:

I was going to ask you because I didn't know if the business college offered an advertising track or anything. So was it just a general business school? You just got an associate's degree or—?

NA:

It was basically accounting, filing, and secretarial office procedures. It was more in the accounting, more emphasis on that, and English, of course.

ES:

Where was it located? I keep asking you about it because I've never heard of it. Where was it located? Do you remember?

NA:

I don't. I think it was located downtown. It was in a two-story building. And Hufstedler Truck Company—I worked in the office there and they were on Texas, like Twenty-Third and Texas, but I can't remember the exact location; but that was the only business college in Lubbock to my knowledge. And then in 1960, my third child was born. Backing up in 1960, I went to work for Buckner Advertising Agency. And then I quit working that year after I had my third child in December. Then in 1961 I went to work for another advertising agency called Webster, Harris Wellborn, and I worked for them for several years until child number four came along, and that was in May of 1965.

(Pause in recording)

ES:

Okay, we're recording again. So you were telling me that you had worked for Rex Webster's firm and then you had to stop again to have your fourth child. Let's back up a little bit because I want to hear—you went to business school, but you got a job at an advertising agency I'm guessing because you needed a job, or were you interested in advertising at that point?

NA:

No, it was because I needed a job, and it was an office manager and secretarial position, and I had experience at business school and even in high school for that. I was qualified for that job.

ES:

What stuff did you take in high school that prepared you for that?

NA:

English, math, and accounting. I had typing, two years of typing.

ES:

Okay.

NA:

So I had high school business courses, and then I took the business courses at the business college. But once I got in there and got exposed, I mean, there were only two ads that I could remember ever seeing, which is really crazy. One of them was for Four Roses Bourbon because I remember the roses, and the other one was the Maidenform Bra Series—that "I dreamed I so and

so am a maiden.” Those were the only two ads I could think of. It was just so funny. Because I read all the time, but I don’t read magazines that have ads. So I found advertising so exciting. And at Buckner Advertising they had two artists that graduated from Tech; they had two journalists that graduated from Tech. So I just asked a million questions and they were polite enough to answer them. And then when I got over to Webster, Harris, Wellborn, well, those three were Tech graduates, two journalism, two art. And then another artist was there that graduated from Tech—so I was exposed—Tech did not have advertising programs at this time; we’re talking in the sixties, so that was the closest thing. So I learned all I could from the journalist and the artist, and I saw how the copywriters, the journalists, did the copy, and the artists; and then they’d have meetings and come up with these ideas and campaigns and things. It was just the most exciting thing that I have ever been exposed to in my life. So I thought, This is it; I’ve got to learn all I can. Okay, so I’m learning advertising.

ES:

Yes, so you’re just asking everybody a thousand questions, and you’re just absorbing everything you can.

NA:

Right, and they were polite enough to answer, and so after I had child number four, I had quit work at Webster, Harris, Wellborn Advertising. But then when child number four—another daughter—was six months old, Dale Buckner called me because his office manager had left. So I went back to Buckner Advertising, a little bit smarter about advertising, mind you. I stayed there and then in 19—well, slowly but surely they let me handle some of the accounts. They would let me have a small account and go out and talk to the client about the ad, or the radio spot, or the TV spot. So slowly but surely I got into the advertising part by doing. And then they let me make some bigger, larger presentations which was really interesting. And then in 1973, Dale Buckner left and went to Waco to teach art at TST, what was known as TSTI then. So we formed Buckner, Craig, and Armstrong. So we formed that corporation advertising agency. And that Craig was the son of the original—the original ad agency in Lubbock was Craig and Webster. And that Craig was the father of the Buckner, Craig, and Armstrong, and I got this large account at that time. Do I mention the account? I got the Gebo’s account, and I think they had ten stores at that time. That was in 1973. This corporation didn’t work out because I was doing all the work, and he was getting most of the money which was not unusual in 1974. So one day I just had this brilliant idea that I would just put in my own agency. So the first thing I did was call the radio stations and the TV stations and ask them if because I was a partner, if they would recognize me as an individual ad agency, and they said yes. So in June of 1974, June the seventh as a matter of fact, I put in my own ad agency. I used freelance artists, and freelance copy writers, and part-time students for some copy and to help with answering the phones and office procedures. So through the years I’ve hired many, many Tech students. And I don’t know when the advertising program at Tech got started. It’s interesting that I don’t know that.

ES:

Right and I don't know. I know that my father was in the business school in the late sixties and he was always interested in advertising and I said, "Well why didn't you just get an advertising degree?" And it may have been that they didn't have it.

NA:

They didn't have it in the sixties, and I don't know when they did put it in. But yes, I was fortunate enough I did the advertising for Gebo's for thirty-five years, which is unheard of to keep an account that long.

ES:

That's amazing, so they went with you from when you were—

NA:

Yes, I called—well, I did not call. I went to Plainview, their home, Gebo's home office in Plainview; so the day I went up there, and I went to three of my other accounts that were local that I wanted to take with me, which two of them were agricultural accounts, and one of them was Plains Cotton Growers Incorporated. To this day I'm still working on a calendar for Plains Cotton Growers. Fifty-five years I've worked with Plains Cotton Growers. Through the years most of my accounts were privately owned businesses or agricultural accounts.

ES:

Now, when you started out, you said that they would give you small accounts.

NA:

Right.

ES:

Was it some of these privately owned businesses, similar things?

NA:

Some of them were, like, maybe a small auto dealership, or a non-profit organization that needed some help. I was trying to think of some. There was some kind of big football game they were trying to get here, and they let me make that presentation and didn't get it. It wasn't because of the presentation, it was because it was that all-American football game out at Tech, and they decided not to do it anymore.

ES:

And then when you were—when you went out on your own, you were mostly ag and private business, but when you had your own, when you were in the partnership with Buckner, was it also mostly ag or was it everything?

NA:

It was more everything. There was some ag, but they did a lot of corporate. Craig did a lot of corporate. But I was account executive there. I was no longer office manager or bookkeeper; we had one of those.

ES:

Well that is what I was about to ask you. So you started out in what seems like a position that many women had in the sixties, office manager type. Were there very many women that had advertising agencies at that point that you knew of in this area?

NA:

I was the first woman in Lubbock to put in an advertising agency in 1974. It was several years before any other woman ever put in one.

ES:

And so the agencies that you were at, it was primarily men? Were the copywriters all men?

NA:

The artists were mostly men, and the copywriters were mostly female.

ES:

Okay.

NA:

Yes. When I went to work at Buckner Advertising in 1960, there was one lady in Lubbock that worked for a radio station that sold radio time; one woman, that's all. And I knew one woman that owned her own business, and that was Ethel McCleod at Stenocall. She's the only woman I knew that owned her own business, and she was such a charmer and so smart, and I thought, Oh, I think I want to be like her.

ES:

Well it seems like you had a knack of identifying, "I want to learn more from these people," or, "I want to be more like this person." And that's how you were able to—

NA:

Right, I mean advertising is just so fascinating. But I guess it runs in the family because I told you I had a sister three years younger than me, and her name is Twila Aufill, and she was the general manager of the Lubbock Avalanche Journal when she retired. So it's kind of interesting that we both ended up being professional women.

ES:

Yeah.

NA:

Especially growing up in Crosbyton.

ES: Definitely, now spell—

NA:

Twila, T-w-i-l-a. And then Aufill, A-u-f-i-l-l.

ES:

Yeah, I'd never gotten that right, so I'm glad you spelled it for me.

NA:

Well, there's several ways to spell "Twila."

ES:

Yeah, I was going to put a "Y" in it, so that's good.

NA:

Excuse me. It would be appropriate at this time to say that our mother worked all the time.

ES:

Okay, tell me about that.

NA:

So I'm sure that had some influence on us because she worked in a variety store, or a drug store, or a movie theater. She worked—she had jobs where she worked with people. When we first moved to Crosbyton, my dad worked for the Pontiac House, but then he eventually got his own business. But Mother didn't quit working because she loved the people, so she worked in jobs around retail, around people.

ES:

So at the movie theater she'd sell tickets or—?

NA:

Yeah.

ES:

So y'all saw from a very young age, then, a woman that was helping support her family, so it wasn't unheard of for you to do that same.

NA:

Yes, I guess we just grew up seeing that so—.

ES:

Well, you went—forgive me, tell me how it went again. Did you get married and then you went to business school? Or did you start business school and then get married?

NA:

No, I got married and then went to business school.

ES:

And was your husband supportive of you wanting to go to business school and have a job?

NA:

Yeah, he was totally supportive—until I got a divorce in 1967.

ES:

So let me ask you—because we don't need to get into the salacious details of your divorce—but I want to know how you were able to juggle four kids and your own agency. How is that possible?

NA:

Well, you plan ahead, but you live one day at a time; you get the kids involved. Well actually, I had two other businesses in between there when I took off. I had an accounting business, and I used to bring them in here and set them on the floor and tell them to sort out the receipts by color. You know, so I got the kids involved a little bit, and as they got a little bit older, well, the girls would kind of learn, "Okay, I'm cooking dinner tonight, maybe hotdogs, but—" I gave them responsibility and pulled them in, like, a lot of the time I spent with them we were actually working, but it was time spent with them. So it was just strong faith. I mean, I can do it; I have to do it; I need to do it; I *want* to do it.

ES:

So you just do it.

NA:

Yeah.

ES:

And you were telling me, too, before we started the recording that having kind of an age spread out helped, too.

NA:

Yes, having one quite a bit older helped because he could help with the girls, so that was very helpful. And the schools were pretty close. Of course one year I had three kids in three schools before any of them got a driver's license. That year was a little tough. But yeah, it's just that you have to do what you have to do. And being that young, I had a lot more energy than I have now. That was one thing, I think. I would go out occasionally, and I kept my friends because I knew if I didn't take care of myself, I couldn't take care of my kids. And that's hard to do, to put yourself first. But you have to do it sometimes.

ES:

Definitely. So the ad agency, it wasn't out of your house; you had another building for an office?

NA:

Yes, I started out over on Avenue Q, and I was there for ten years, and then I moved over to Nashville Avenue, and I was over there for a long time before I moved my office. I just moved my office to my house when I got down. I was only advertising for three clients, and I wasn't taking anymore new business because I didn't want to work full time.

ES:

Now I—one of the articles I found said that when you first started out, you had just borrowed a bunch of furniture. You had said earlier that you were doing freelance stuff. So tell me about really starting off on your own and some of the hardships.

NA:

Okay, this day which was the day before June the seventh, which is June the sixth, the day that I decided to put in an agency that I was qualified that I could handle it, that I had that. I had \$500 which was two week's pay. So I put that \$500 in the bank; I set up a card table. I knew a man that owned an office building. I called him and said, "I am using your address. Your office building is my address. As soon as I can, I will come down and rent an office." I borrowed two chairs from somebody; I don't remember who, and that was my desk. Then, of course, I had the

records of the clients that I took with me. So yeah, and I made more money in that half year from June through December than I had made the total year the year before. So that told me I had done the right thing. But bless some of my friends that owned businesses; a few of them call me after I've been in business a few months and they wanted to know if—they had an opening, and they were offering me a job if I needed it. They had an opening at their business. And so many new businesses fail within the first three years. So they wanted to know if everything was going okay, and I told them it was, but I thought that was real good that they thought of me.

ES:

Yeah, that they were trying to take care of you.

NA:

Right, and an interesting tidbit; Rex Webster hired me without ever having met me.

ES:

Your reputation preceded you?

NA:

I did not go in for an interview; he called me and offered me a job and he said, "I talked to Dale Buckner, and he said you are the person for this job, so when can you come to work?" That blew my mind.

ES:

You, by this point, have obviously developed a reputation around town. People were coming to you for their advertising needs. Word of mouth had spread. But tell me a typical client, or take Gebo's for example, what media would y'all pursue? What type of ads would y'all run?

NA:

We ran newspaper, number one; TV, number two; and radio, number three. We just advertised consumer goods. I mean, like, Gebo's is not just a western store, they have cat food, they have clothing, they have dog food, sprinklers—you know, let people know. I did a lot of advertising for West Texas Optical; they were in the mall, when the mall was fairly new. We did a lot of advertising for them, but they were mostly print advertising, direct mail and newspaper.

ES:

So how long did it take before you were up and running and you felt like, "We've got this going?" You weren't using the card table anymore; you had hired on people.

NA:

You know, I don't really remember that; it's kind of funny, but I do recall—oh I would say it was less than—once I got in there I pretty much knew, Okay, I've nailed it; it's going to work. So then I went to a furniture store and bought used furniture. Yeah. I got a desk, and a filing cabinet, and two chairs, and gave the loaner chair, and put the card table in the back room. I did at least start out with two rooms in my office, which I moved in that building three different times. I kept adding space, but yes. I usually had one person full time and then a couple of Tech students part-time. And the reason I used freelance artists is because at the other agencies the art departments always lost money because you never sold as much art as you paid the artist. So with freelance artists, they send you a bill, and you bill the client; the client sees the bill; he knows exactly. So I saved money there by using freelance artists and freelance copywriters. But then I did eventually hire full-time copywriters. But I never hired a full-time artist in all those years.

ES:

There was an artist whose estate sale I went to recently, and she seemed to have done a lot of advertising for Margaret's and some other stuff, Jeanie Jones. Did you ever work with her?

NA:

No, I didn't even know her, which I thought was real strange because I remember Margaret's because Buckner Advertising was down on Broadway, and Margaret's was just down the street, but no, I never knew her.

ES:

Okay, it's one little connection, one name I knew. You know, if you talk to Monte [Monroe], he knows everybody.

NA:

Has he been there forever?

ES:

Not forever, but long enough. And his wife is a lawyer and does all this stuff in town, so he knows everybody through that. So were you noticing in the seventies—as the seventies progressed—more women entering advertising, entering being artists, and everything?

NA:

Not really in the seventies, it was not noticeable until the eighties, actually. I'm sure there were a few that were coming in, but it wasn't enough to say noticeable. It was just a few coming in. And then in the eighties, there are few women that put in ad agencies, but none of them lasted as long as mine did.

ES:

Well you had laid a very good foundation by that point.

NA:

And one other thing I did in 19—this was before I put in my own agency. I was executive secretary of the Lubbock Advertising Federation for twenty-one years. So, I knew all these advertising people from the ad federation, and occasionally they would send me a client.

ES:

Okay, tell me about this federation. What was its goals? What did it do?

NA:

Well, I think the Lubbock chapter was founded—

(Recording stops)

ES:

Okay, we're back, and we've got a Gebo's scrapbook that was just salvaged, and you were saying that when they moved to their new location—who was it that did the illustrations?

NA:

H. V. Greer, he taught art at Tech sometime, and he worked at ad agencies. They were at Fiftieth and—they moved to Fiftieth and A from Broadway and A. The title of the first ad was, "We Moved our Stock."

ES:

And so was he—it looks like he did a bunch of the paintings.

NA:

Right, he did.

ES:

He was one of the freelance people you used quite frequently? The print back in this time—it would have all been black and white, like pen work primarily?

NA:

Yeah, too bad I don't have any dates.

ES:

No, that's okay. This looks like the stuff from the seventies.

NA:

We're still in the seventies. I really thought I had given this to Gebo's.

ES:

Do you think they need this?

NA:

No.

ES:

Okay. Oh yeah, I see where you changed the address here. It's taped over.

NA:

Yeah, they had a lot of different stores, so we had to bundle these ads, and wrap them up, and take them to the post office, and mail them out to the other ten stores.

ES:

Okay. Is Gebo's—?

NA:

They're privately owned.

ES:

Yeah, but I don't see too many advertisements from them these days.

NA:

Well see, that's one reason I quit handling their ads is because they quit doing TV, and TV was one of their better—

(Pause in recording)

ES:

Okay, so we've had a brief pause. We found a scrapbook that we're going to take into the Southwest Collection, and then you showed me a room, and this is what I wanted to ask you about. So when you started your agency, the agency's name was N. Armstrong. Was that intentional that you didn't say your first name?

NA:

Yes, that was very intentional because N. Armstrong advertising gives you no clue if that is male or female. So, yes that was the reason that I did it. Because as I told you before there were, well, no female alone advertising agencies in Lubbock at the time I put mine in, so I thought—

ES:

It was a way to remain—

NA:

At first I was not even going to use Armstrong, but the men that I had worked for assured me that I needed my name in the name of the company because that's what more people go by is the name, especially when they refer somebody to an ad agency. I changed my mind; but yes, that was definitely intentional, and yes I did receive mail for Neil Armstrong addressed to Neil Armstrong. It was really for me.

ES:

But they just assumed.

NA:

Right.

ES:

So it was an attempt to be gender neutral, and it did help your business early on it seems.

NA:

I think it did, yes.

ES:

Well, you said you were thinking about not even using your name at all. What was the agency's name going to be if it hadn't been your name?

NA:

It was something like Adventure Advertising. Something pretty boring. I don't remember exactly. I had a couple.

ES:

But Armstrong, because it has strong it sounds like a very reputable and established agency. It sounds good.

NA:

It's a good solid Irish American name I think.

ES:

Yeah, yeah so that does help. But at some point you did go back and actually put in your first name in the agency title or was it—?

NA:

I never did.

ES:

So it was always N. Armstrong Agency?

NA:

Yes.

ES:

Okay, so before, many eons before we were talking about the Lubbock Advertising Federation and what their function was.

NA:

Oh, I think it was established in 1956 or '58 in Lubbock by basically the same men and a few women that established the Better Business Bureau of Lubbock, and it was called the Lubbock Advertising Club at that time. It was to promote honesty, integrity, and to keep advertising ethics high in your advertising. So it was basically to promote advertising and raise the standard of ethics. And then the local club is part of a Tenth District, which is Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and western Louisiana, and that's called the Tenth District. Then you're automatically a part of the Tenth District when you join the local, and then you're part of the national. It's amazing how the numbers have dropped from the national membership to what it was, say, in the nineties to what it is now. It's going down instead of up.

ES:

It sounds like it's like a lot of the clubs, like music clubs, that they're losing their members as well. So you were involved in this federation for—?

NA:

Well, I was executive secretary for twenty-one years, and then I was second vice president, president, ex-president. I mean, I went through the ranks of officers after that. I went to a lot of the Tenth District meetings representing them. The last time Lubbock had the district convention was in 1992, so we did a lot of work on that. We've only had two—they called the leader of the

Tenth District a governor—and we've only had two governors from Lubbock, and one of them was Dale Buckner, and the other one was Phil Price. Those were the only two governors we've ever had from Lubbock.

ES:

It seems like Buckner had a big influence on you.

NA:

Oh, he was so creative, the most outstanding. He always wore a straw hat, not a cowboy hat, but I guess a Panama hat maybe, and a bolo tie. He loved Ruidoso and art, especially Western art. As you can see in my house, there is a bit of an influence of Southwest about that probably came from him. So yeah, the other thing was that he was the first person in Lubbock to ever do an advertising campaign where you use the theme in more than one media because he did radio, TV, and newspaper all on the same campaign; and nobody else in Lubbock had ever done that. And that was in the sixties. Yeah, amazing.

ES:

So tell me about how you would translate between the mediums. So you would have the same theme; how would you make it work for TV? How would you make it work for radio, for print?

NA:

Well, say you're having an automotive sale for twenty-four hours, you've got to buy the time for the TV and that space; you've got to get to the radio station and make sure they have some time. You've got to get the ad to the newspaper on time and make sure it all comes out timely, or the whole thing is blown. So you just work with each medium as you need them. And some campaigns might just be TV and radio. We call them campaigns if they're two or more. But just single—we did actually more just single ads than campaigns most of the time.

ES:

The radio spots: would you record them in the radio—who would record them? Did you have like a voice personality?

NA:

When I first started way back in the sixties, when I worked for someone else, we had someone at the radio station that did live. They also did TV live. It's been the most fascinating era of TV. We have gone from live TV, where we do a commercial for a grocery store using butter for ice cream and hoping it doesn't melt like the ice cream did, to the digital age. It's just incredible all the steps that TV has been through; but no, later, most of the time I recorded mine at a local studio. Kenny Maines was their Gebo's spokesman for, like, ten or twelve years.

ES:

We have the *Don Caldwell Collection* at the Southwest Collection. So we've got all the tapes, the master tapes from the Caldwell Studios. When I told my boss that I was coming to interview you—Curtis Peoples, and he worked for Caldwell Studios. So at one point he was like, "She did all these Gebo's campaigns, didn't she?" I was like, "I think so."

NA:

Yeah, if you've got all of Caldwell's stuff, you've got a lot of Gebo's. And then after Kenny quit, well Donny Allison started; so I was real lucky. I really had very few problems working with people. They all seemed so nice and eager to help me, including Don Caldwell and the others. So that made it a little bit easier. It wasn't like, "Oh, I don't want to go record this today, blah, blah."

ES:

Do you think it had something to do with just your inherent nature? You just wanted to work with people and get along with them?

NA:

I think the biggest thing was the fact that I respected them and I paid att—I mean they were the best in their field. So why would I try to tell them what to do? So I showed them respect, and I had confidence in their work. I think that was why it was easy to work with them. That sounded pretty good.

ES:

That's good sound advice for anything really. So in addition to the Lubbock Advertising Federation, there was also other organizations in town that you were involved in. Like the Women in Communications? Is that another thing?

NA:

Yes, do you have—I mean—I don't know how many organizations.

ES:

Yeah, we don't have the next five years to talk about—we don't have all that time.

NA:

I mean, I was past president of Women in Communications. I was the secretary for that for probably ten years. I served on the board of the Arts Alliance. I was on the board of the Women's Division of the Chamber of Commerce. I used to be a member of the Symphony Guild. I was publicity person for the Achievement Rewards for College Scientists for a couple of years.

ES:

I saw that there was something about the Women's Studies Program at Tech that you were a part of.

NA:

I was a member of that until we dissolved that, yes.

ES:

So you worked with all of these organizations, not only business organizations, but arts. You were talking about Symphony Guild and the Arts Alliance. It would sound weird to say why, but tell me what kept you going with all these organizations?

NA:

Well advertising is an art.

ES:

Oh yeah, definitely.

NA:

So I guess that is what appealed to me. Every little thing you learn somewhere goes back in the old advertising creative brain. And sometimes it pops out as a good idea. But I don't know; growing up in a small town like Crosbyton, there wasn't a whole lot of art and music and stuff like that. So maybe that made me more aware that these people needed help, and I don't know, it just seemed to fit. Yeah, I was a member of the Executive Forum, which was women that were either honors or vice presidents of their business. I did belong to some business things, but mostly it was the creative and the advertising. I spent lots of time on the advertising club.

ES:

And so was it also an opportunity to help cultivate another generation of women in advertising, women artists, or just help create a culture?

NA:

No, I would say most of the Tech students that I hired—I was more adamant about honesty, integrity, how to—instead of on the arts side, it leaned a little bit more to the business end because I thought they were getting the advertising part at school. So I was trying to teach them—I mean, they were helpful and did copyrighting and stuff, but no, you don't mess with artists too much. They kind of have their style, and either you take it or leave it. We didn't put in there anywhere when I got a divorce, did we?

ES:

No, do you want to?

NA:

Maybe that didn't matter, but I think it does.

ES:

So the article, that one article I found very quickly on you—it was some of the papers that you donated—and it was from the early or mid-eighties, I think it was mid-eighties, and it was like a profile of Lubbock women. And it had this thing about you, and it did mention that you had gotten a divorce, and you had to raise your kids and raise a business, so you were giving advice to other women. I thought it was—you know, you talked about in the eighties you started seeing more women in the field, and so I thought that coincides nicely. So your divorce was in the sixties, right?

NA:

Yes, I got a divorce in 1967. I was working at Buckner Advertising again when I got a divorce. So I did have a job, but I also had an accounting job. I owned an accounting business that I worked at night.

ES:

From home?

NA:

Well, I had an office, but I worked mostly from home. And that was when I involved the kids that we talked about earlier.

ES:

The other thing we didn't do is we didn't have you just name off your kids. You've had four, and you told me some of when they were born, but can you just tell me?

NA:

Well let's see, let's test my memory. My son is Gregory Dale Armstrong, G-r-e-g-o-r-y, since I don't know how to spell Gregory, obviously. He was born in August 1954. My daughter Lisa Anne Armstrong, named after the Mona Lisa, was born in September 1959. Cynthia Gene, better known as Cindy Armstrong, was born December 7, 1960. She's deceased in April 1997.

ES:

Okay.

NA:

And my youngest daughter is Leslie Dawn Armstrong and she was born 5-6-65.

ES:

That made it easy on you.

NA:

Right, and I got a divorce in 1967, when she was two years old. So we can put that in there.

ES:

That's a good timeline, too. And that also coincides back with where you were working, so that's good. I'm looking over my notes that I took for you.

NA:

And they all have—well, three of them have college degrees, but it's kind of interesting. Cindy worked for me as my office operations manager, and she went to Business College also. She went to Angelo State for a year, and then she didn't like it so she went to Business College, so she ended up working for me.

ES:

So she took your same path.

NA:

Yeah she did, kind of interesting.

ES:

Yeah.

NA:

Lisa is an RN, and Leslie is a school teacher, and Greg works for the Army Corps of Engineers.

ES:

Oh wow. So Lisa's the one you're moving to Abilene.

NA:

Right, yeah. She's the RN and she used to work in day surgery, but now she just—there is some kind of new rule about coding; all of the papers that are inserted to send in for payment to Medicare or something, and it's something totally new. I don't know much about it, but she's a coder now working with the doctors, making sure they got the codes right. But she's off her feet. She had scoliosis, and she had back surgery when she was thirteen at the Scottish Rite Hospital

in Dallas. She had a backward “S” curve and they put a steel rod in her back. So her back—she’s been working in the hospital like twenty years, so she’s got a pretty much sit down job, which is good, but yeah. You’re going to laugh your head off when you go back and listen to this.

ES:

No, no. We’re all over the place, but we’re getting it all. That was the thing that I wanted to ask you about. So I’d also read that you were a charter member of the Covenant Presbyterian Church.

NA:

Right.

ES:

And that article I was reading about from the mid-eighties talked about all the work that you were doing with the church or it talked a little bit about it. So tell me about your involvement in the church.

NA:

Well, Covenant Presbyterian Church was formed in 1971 by two other smaller churches merging, and I was a member of one of those smaller churches.

ES:

What were those churches? Of course I would ask you that, right?

NA:

John Knox Presbyterian.

ES:

And something else.

NA:

I was a member at John Knox, and I cannot remember the name, but I became a Presbyterian because some of the people that I worked for in advertising were Presbyterians, and I was so impressed that they lived their religion every day that I checked out—I grew up being Baptist so I checked out Presbyterianism and found out it was for me because they were always so positive. They didn’t have those negative vibes. So, I started communications committee at that church. Of course, we didn’t have much of anything, so we started a communications committee that worked with the person’s secretary in the office to help get the communications out. Then I worked in fellowship committee, and I worked on education committee, and I am an elder at Covenant Presbyterian Church. The committee we had—one committee, Vision and Visitation,

was a three year committee, and we studied where the church is, where the church would be, where we would like for it to be, and now we're in phase two of the remodeling, but I have worked on almost all the committees that we have over there. It seems a little strange right now not to be on a church committee, but I'm not.

ES:

But you're about to find a new church.

NA:

Yes, well I have one granddaughter and seven grandsons, and my granddaughter got married in Abilene in April at Westminster—not Westminster—First Central Presbyterian Church in Abilene. So I am familiar with that church, and I know a few people there.

ES:

So you said that the advertisers, they were all Presbyterian. Do you think your faith—?

NA:

They weren't all.

ES:

Well not all, but you noticed some of them more. Do you think that your faith had an impact on your business, how you ran your business, or how you ran your life?

NA:

It definitely had an effect of how it ran. I mean, my life ran on faith because I didn't have the business. I was working for someone else when I first got the divorce. I had to have faith that I was going to get there today, and my kids would be okay. And I definitely tried to keep the ethics high. Yeah, I read something in one of those articles from 1970 the other day—or the seventies the other day—and it said, "If you're a female business owner you can get a client by being a female, but you cannot keep a client by being a female." Profound (laughing). I wonder who I copied that from. I thought that was interesting.

ES:

So tell me about—that's a good segue; tell me about some of the shifting perspective you noticed over the years?

NA:

Well, I noticed more women that do own their own business, and they work at it real hard and they're successful. I have noticed that there are a few more men that are like office managers and that type of position which normally, or not normally, but in days gone by, would be filled by

females; and some of those positions are males. But it seems that most of the women that go in business stay in business, and I don't know if it's because they're doing more research before they start their business, or if they're just working harder, or just plain lucky, which is a combination of hard work and luck, but yeah it is. We still don't make the same amount of money, but I don't rant and rave about that enough. Just so I can pay the bills and taxes, and I used to say to keep shoes on the kids' feet.

ES:

Is that something that you noticed that you wanted to—you went out on your own, did you feel like, "Okay I'm going to—" You mentioned it earlier in that first six months you were making more money immediately. Did you make a conscious effort, "You were like I'm going to make—"

NA:

No, no I did not. Money has not been my number one, two, or three priority. Just so I have enough money to pay the bills, put shoes on the kids, and donate and do some charity work. No, money wasn't the—it's kind of like, "Okay, I'm going to do this, this, and this, and this is how much money I made on it, and if it wasn't enough, I wouldn't do that anymore," but it was more like, "No, I have to live on the money that I make," instead of saying, "I have to make so much money to live." I kind of reversed it. And it wasn't like I spent money wining and dining or clients or playing golf. That was not me; that's not the way I did business. But I think I had the respect, obviously, of my clients or they wouldn't have been clients.

ES:

One of the things I read was that you stayed in this house for so long because it was paid for. You paid off the house, so why move?

NA:

Yeah, once you get a house paid for—that's funny. Yeah, some of that stuff—there's one article in there; be sure and read it. It's from 1970, no, it's '78. I made some strange statements in there. There were so few women in business, and like I said, there were hardly any women in TV sales or radio sales. There weren't any in newspaper sales then at all.

ES:

What I find interesting is you really have to search—I have to search online today to find women talking to other women about how they found success and what they would do to help other women, and I saw in some of the articles you had, you were purporting this; you were spouting this in the eighties and the seventies. So you were an early adopter of trying to tell women, "This is the road you can take."

NA:

Yeah, do this or don't do this.

ES:

So what are some of—now in hindsight, now that you're moving out of this house, you're moving on. What are some of the things that you would look back on and say, "This is how you could do it. This is how you can be successful." Or what would you do differently? I'm going to leave that open ended, you just tell me some reflections of your time here.

NA:

Well, it was most pleasant being in the advertising business. I mean, it was always fun. I never dreaded going to work. Being part of the Lubbock community and the different organizations and everything was very nice. I didn't do it for business reasons, though; I wasn't trying, and I did not get business from those. Most of my new business that I got were referrals from other clients, where I got most of my new business to keep growing and stay afloat. It's been interesting to watch Lubbock grow. I still am having trouble with how much traffic we have because Lubbock has grown so much since 1960. Well actually, it's grown so much since 2000, that the traffic is really strange for an older person because we don't like to drive real fast. Young people get a little tired of driving behind us.

ES:

Well when this house—did you buy this house new or was it—?

NA:

Yes, we bought this house new. I'm the only person that's ever lived here, and it's the last street that had houses on it.

ES:

And what year was this house built?

NA:

1960. It was built in the fall of '60, and that's when I had Cindy, in December of '60. We moved here in January of '61. So yeah, I'm the only person that's ever lived in this house. It's *my* house. Time for somebody else to enjoy it. It's a great house because it's big, and it's close to school, walking distance to Bayless and Adkins and a park, two parks close by. It used to be South Lubbock when we moved here, but now it's central Lubbock. I find that interesting. It's been nice to see Tech grow as much as it has in advertising and journalism. Picking up because people keep saying, "Well, newspapers and magazines are going out." But I don't think they'll ever truly go out. There will always be some kind of them. Of course, the friendly people, you can't mention Lubbock without talking about the friendly people.

ES:

That made me think, though. With Tech and advertising now and your experience—your best employees, were they very well trained Tech grads? Were they people that were self-taught? Was it just whoever had a passion for the work?

NA:

I would say the ones that had their education from Tech with a little bit of work experience to go along with it, yeah. What I found lacking in some was how to act in a business. They knew the advertising, but they didn't really understand that you're nice to clients and you're not rude to sales people. Some of those basic things that you would think they would have learned at home, not at college, but they didn't learn. And that was kind of disappointing.

ES:

Did you ever do things like internships with Tech kids so that they could get some of this practical experience?

NA:

Yes, I did. I've hired so many Tech kids; I wish I had kept a diary. That is one of my regrets, that I didn't keep a diary of all the Tech students that worked for me. I know where some of them are now, but some of them I've totally forgotten. I used to have an intern almost every year where they got experience for that.

ES:

So the Lubbock A-J, when I looked for your name, when I googled your name, one of the things the A-J said was that you were one of the most influential people of Lubbock history.

NA:

Oh yeah, isn't that a hoot? Yes, I was in the top 200 most influential people in Lubbock which blew me away.

ES:

So do you think you've had that much of an impact? How did you react?

NA:

I was shocked. Not surprised that I was in the second hundred instead of the first hundred. The only thing I could think about is how many organizations I worked with and almost every organization that I worked with I did their PR, basically. The media—I was very well known in the media, and I had contacts, plus all of the students at Tech I helped. So I accused several people of putting my name in there, and they all denied it. So I don't know. Of course, one thing we haven't talked about is being inducted into the Mass Com. Hall of Fame.

ES:

Tell me about that.

NA:

That is my number one accomplishment besides raising my kids. I was so shocked I couldn't believe it, but they sent me a form the year before and said I had been nominated, and they send those forms out like the year before, and you just fill them out and mail them back in and then forget it. When I found out, I was the second woman to be inducted into the Mass Comm. Hall of Fame, and that was in 1997. There's only been one more since then, so there are now, still, only three women at Tech in the Mass Comm. Hall of Fame.

ES:

Who are the other two, do you remember?

NA:

I can't give you the name at the moment, but they both do PR for Southwestern Airlines—Southwest Airlines. I know their names, but I can't think of them at the moment.

ES:

I can look them up, and I put you on the spot anyway.

NA:

That's okay. And the other award that was very surprising is that 10th District Advertising Federation that I told you about earlier? They gave a sterling service award every year for a person that's donated meaningful things to advertising, and they gave me that one year. So I was real surprised. Once again, Phil Price and I are the only two people from Lubbock that have received that award. That's pretty special because that's like twelve hundred members or something like that.

ES:

I also saw that you had won some Addy awards?

NA:

Oh yeah.

ES:

And we were looking in the other room at that Addy poster; you were in charge of it one year. Tell me more about the Addy's.

NA:

The Addy's? Well that's sponsored by the Lubbock—well the Lubbock Advertising Federation is now called AAF Lubbock—and that's where American Advertising Federation, and they would ask all the clubs or Federations to go by AAF-Lubbock or San Antonio or Houston. So we have local competition, and the national sets up all the rules for it and we have a local competition. If you win an Addy or a silver certificate, you can enter that in the district level, and then if you win at the district level, you can take it to the national level. So we have a local awards ceremony. There are ten districts in the United States of America of advertising and that's where the Tenth District comes in. I don't know exactly why we're stuck where we are being ten. But anyway, if you win there, you can go to the national deal.

ES:

And you've won for—what were some of the ads that you won for in the past? Do you remember?

NA:

I would say most of them were probably Gebo's television. Oh, I think we did Gebo's jingle. Yeah, I wish I had known Monte wanted that ad stuff because I threw away a ton of that the week before.

ES:

We won't tell him.

NA:

No, no we cannot tell him. I told him to check with Pam Short to see if she had any. I know—Plains Cotton Growers won some, Plains Seed and Delinting. There was this one non-profit that Kenny and I did a jingle for that won, and now I can't think of what it is. I can't remember anymore.

ES:

That's okay. What else am I forgetting to ask you about? You reminded me of the awards that we hadn't talked about, but what else?

NA:

Well, you might ask me how hard it was to retire.

ES:

Now you said earlier you did. You took less clients for a while.

NA:

Right, and then I just—

ES:

And you came back here.

NA:

Yeah, I moved my office to my house, just did advertising for a few people, and just slowly but surely got out of it.

ES:

Well how difficult has it been to just kind of close the door? It seems like Gebo's has been a big part of your life.

NA:

Oh yes, it was, yes. I worked for three generations at Gebo's. That is their actual number, and they are privately owned, family owned. Yeah, that was very good. But what I missed was not doing the ads and the deadlines, especially the deadlines, but I missed all the media people. You know, if you have an office in a building, well Joe Blow lives down the hall or Jerry Smith or something. You know, they come by, they wave. So I really miss the social contact of the media more than the business part. It's been kind of strange, but now there's so many young advertising people in Lubbock that I haven't kept up with them, and I don't know who most of them are. I'm kind of aggravated at myself for that.

ES:

Well what did you do when you—how did you retire? It was piecemeal right? You started—

NA:

After my daughter died, that was my operations manager and everything. Well, I decided I don't know what I'm going to do, so I just kind of cut back, and I didn't take any new accounts, but I kept the ones I had. And then Gebo's quit advertising on TV, so I quit working with them. Then I worked with a few other clients, and it's just kind of like—well actually, I've got one project going to deadline. There's a piece of art in the mail for the Plains Cotton Grower's Calendar as we speak, but that's my last job.

ES:

Your final one.

NA:

That's my final job.

ES:

You can frame it and put it on your wall.

NA:

That's right, yeah. This is it.

ES:

And how are you feeling now that you're going to be retired?

NA:

Well I figure that when I get to Abilene, one of the things I'll do is contact the people in advertising that I know down there and see what's going on.

ES:

You could become a freelance person yourself.

NA:

I could, but I have really bad knees so I can't walk very far, but yeah. I'll probably join the church's little old ladies bible study group. My daughter belongs to a book club, so I go to that a whole lot. I read a whole whole lot.

ES:

That's good.

NA:

One thing that's kind of funny that I didn't mention, and I don't know where it fit in, but one time somebody out at Tech asked to come speak to this advertising class, and so I had this full Gebo's campaign. We'd done the whole thing, radio, TV, newspaper, inserts. So I had my presentation all ready, and I'm expecting, like, ten to twenty students or something; and I go out there, and it's in an auditorium and there's two-hundred students there, and I'm a spec down there on the stage and I'm going, "Oh my gosh." Fortunately, I was well prepared. Then one time we had a agri-marketing group out at Tech, but we couldn't get the support, and I spoke to them several times about advertising and that was, like, twenty people in that class.

ES:

So it seems like even though you didn't graduate from Tech, you had an influence on the students and it really did—Tech really helped your business because you had Tech graduates working for you. Then you would go speak to the students, and you would get involved with their stuff.

NA:

Yeah, I judged some of their marketing concepts and stuff like that occasionally.

ES:

So you may not have a diploma on the wall from Tech, but it's really helped shape it.

NA:

I am a friend of Tech.

ES:

That works; that works. And you are a permanent fixture in Texas Tech because we've got your collection.

NA:

Oh, that's just awesome. Thank you.

ES:

Oh yeah, not a problem. I wish we could have gotten to you a little sooner and taken on a little more stuff, but we're not going to worry about that. What we've got is that, and we've got this recording. So before I turn it off, just think of anything else that you might want somebody a hundred years from now to hear about anything.

NA:

Wow.

ES:

No pressure or anything.

NA:

No, no pressure at all. A hundred years from now. Maybe stay on the straight and narrow, but keep going?

ES:

Okay, that sounds like good advice; that really does.

NA:

It makes me sad.

ES:

Sad? Why sad?

NA:

I don't know, a hundred years.

ES:

I didn't mean to make you cry.

NA:

You're not making me cry. I'm just so tired. But I'm real happy to do this interview; don't misunderstand me.

ES:

The whole point of this is some of these stories, the struggles that you went through, the ways that you were able to take care of the kids and still grow a business. Those are the kinds of stories that don't often get told. They are the ones that get lost, so those are the ones that I like to chronicle, and I like to have for women a hundred years from now so that they understand what you went through.

NA:

Well, one thing that's interesting—my youngest daughter came home from school one day after I got a divorce, and I had asked her if she had done her homework. She said, no, she didn't have to do her homework. And I said, "Why don't you have to do your homework?" and she said, "Because kids with divorced parents don't make good grades." So we had a little talk with that teacher. The teacher has actually said that.

ES:

Really?

NA:

Yeah, we're talking fourth or fifth grade or something. But when I got a divorce, one thing I made sure of, I kept the house; I kept the kids in the neighborhood; I kept them in their school; I kept them at the same church. It's not like—and luckily I was able to do that, but so many women that get divorces, they have to sell the house, and they have to move to an apartment, and they have to move from apartment to apartment.

ES:

Or they have to have joint custody of the kids or something.

NA:

Yeah, I was real happy when my ex-husband moved out of town. I mean, he still could visit them anytime he wanted to, basically, but he moved to East Texas. Of course, he would pick them up

in the summertime and spoil them on vacation, and then it would take me a week or two to get them back in their routine. But he didn't live there, and that joint custody literally blows my mind. I cannot imagine having kids every other weekend and every other Wednesday and living in two houses. It's just like, can that really be good for the kids? But I really got upset when I found out kids of divorced parents don't make good grades.

ES:

Well did you or did your kids have other issues with you remaining single and being just a single mom? Were there any sort of hardships with that?

NA:

No, my oldest daughter told me not very long ago, she said, "Mom, thanks for not letting me wake up every morning with a different man in your bed like some of my friends' mothers do." I said, "Okay." Yeah like I said, I dated this man a long time, but I never lived with him, never had sex in this house. I was very protective of my kids. They came first.

ES:

It seems like that was kind of one part of your life was—what am I trying to say, stability, that was always a central focus of your life was making sure your kids had food on the table, making sure they had this home, making sure you were always there for them.

NA:

Yeah, they were definitely number one.

ES:

That's the way it should be done.

NA:

It's not much harder raising for than two, actually.

ES:

Really?

NA:

It's that second one that makes that big difference.

ES:

I'm an only child, and my parents were like, "We're not having another kid. We have one; that's enough."

NA:

How funny.

ES:

But I imagine, you know. Well, I don't even know what it would be like to have four kids and work full time.

NA:

Well there's never a dull moment.

ES:

That's true. And maybe not a lot of time for sleep, either.

NA:

Well, I don't require a whole lot of sleep, but I like to sleep late, and that was always a hassle. And my oldest daughter was pretty embarrassed when I used to drive her over to Monterrey for driver's ed before school, and I still had my hair in rollers.

ES:

That was one hardship she faced.

NA:

I'm real thankful that my kids turned out to be pretty well balanced and educated, you know. To me they're cream of the crop.

ES:

And your grandkids are probably pretty amazing, too, then.

NA:

Oh yes, each generation gets smarter and smarter. It blows my mind. I've got a couple of grandkids that are just computer people that just really scramble the brain.

ES:

Well, if there's nothing else, I'm going to turn off the recording. I don't want to make you too sentimental, but I want to thank you so much for this. Thank you for talking to me.

end of recording