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One How I Got into Politics

I wasn't having much luck getting a job after I got out of law school in 1949 and learned in August that I had passed the bar examination. There was no good reason to feel my being a woman was making it hard. All the same, I decided I might do better at First Federal Savings and Loan, where Geraldine Braley was president and all the employees were women.

Miss Braley got right down to business. "Do you drink?" she asked me.

"Yes," I said, "but only socially."

"My girls don't drink," she said. "Do you smoke?"

"Yes," I said again, "but I wouldn't need to smoke at work."

"Our girls don't smoke," she said. "Do you drink coffee?" she asked.

Now really, I thought. Surely that was acceptable. "Yes," I said.

"Our girls drink tea," she said. I knew the interview was over, although I don't remember when it actually ended.

It wasn't long after that that I had an appointment with Clarence Motz, the head of the law firm of Motz, Morris, Wilson, and Quine, which had its offices on the seventeenth floor of the First National Tower in downtown Akron. Clarence Motz was also the Summit County Democratic chairman. My father was a Democratic precinct committeeman, a job he regarded as a form of entertainment, but there was a factional battle going on for control of the party, and my father's dependable vote for Mr. Motz as party chairman probably explains why Mr. Motz was willing to see me. He didn't have an opening for a lawyer, but after we talked awhile, he said he needed someone to hold down the Democratic campaign headquarters until the election in November—to be there if someone came in and to answer the phone and do a few letters for Bernie Rosen, the campaign chairman. He asked if I typed. I had sworn that I would never answer yes to that question. I said "Just hunt and peck." But that was enough. "No" probably would have done just as well. The job was mine for six or seven weeks at twenty-five dollars a week. I wasn't going to get rich, but I certainly was going to enjoy myself.

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Clarence E. Motz, Summit County
Democratic Chairman.

The headquarters was in a loft over Ted Boyer's Backstage Bar behind the Colonial Theater on Mill Street. (I gave my mother the street address on High Street.) Mostly it was a big empty space and surprisingly clean, although the wooden floor was black with age and the walls had what was probably their original coat of paint. I sat behind a high counter at the top of the stairs that came up from the street. The office for Bernie Rosen was partitioned off behind me.

A good-sized room was also partitioned off along the front wall. I didn't hear a sound from the room the first day or two that I was there, but the next day the smell of coffee brought out a big, pleasant woman in a flowered wrapper who identified herself as a friend of Mr. Boyer's. We visited nearly every morning and usually had the place to ourselves. If someone did start to come in, there was plenty of warning on the wooden steps to send my friend skedaddling with excited hoots for her room. She had endless questions about my life and times. I regret now that I didn't ask many back because I bet she had some great stories.

Most of the time, however, I sat alone, waiting for the phone to ring and arranging and rearranging the candidates' literature along the length of the

counter—"literature," I learned, being the term for campaign brochures, cards, and folders. The party's folder about all its candidates was distinguished as the "party piece."

I swept the floor every day, sure that some of the blackness would come up if I kept at it. I also set the rental chairs in rows for the occasional meeting on the premises. The high spots were the days Bernie Rosen came in. Bernie was a young lawyer and the new father of Freda, his first child. Bright and funny himself, Bernie was often amused by others. I've enjoyed his appreciative laughs all these years since, even when I've been the one amusing him. Fortunately, he didn't try to dictate a letter to me because it might have turned out written in early Greek, but sometimes he'd ask me to write to someone about something. With time on my hands and a great eagerness to please, I would then devote hours to composing a letter confirming an appointment, say, or giving notice of a meeting of the Third Ward Democratic Club.

Most ward clubs were mushroom clubs, like our own Fourth Ward club, that sprang up only at election time each year to put on a card party, a rally, or a covered-dish supper so candidates would have an opportunity to do a little campaigning. I wasn't expected to go to those meetings, but Mr. Motz (I never called him Clarence) suggested I go one Saturday to the October meeting of the Federated Democratic Women of Summit County, whose members he counted on to address all the party literature destined for the mail. There was a nice, clean division of labor between the sexes in those days. Women did the work. Men did the talking. Men also held all the public offices, with a few notable exceptions.

One of those exceptions was the speaker for the Federated Democratic Women that Saturday in the pine-paneled dining room on the first floor of the YWCA. It was State Senator Catherine R. Dobbs. Catherine Dobbs had quite a romantic story. It was said that her husband, Roy, who was mayor of Barberton at one time and somewhat older than Catherine, had educated her, albeit narrowly, and she was reputed to be a writer and a historian, al-

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though no one I knew ever saw anything she wrote. Catherine was a good-looking woman, a natural ash blonde who pulled her hair back dramatically under a black tam and who wore a black pinstriped suit and a white satin blouse that day and every other time I ever saw her, for years.

That day in October 1949, she was talking about the suffering of our boys at Valley Forge. “You can forget the food but send us shoes,” she said they wrote to their families. This made a big impression on me. So did her reference to “that mute symbol standing in the corner.” I sneaked a look over my shoulder. It was a dispirited flag. Catherine could be a spellbinder.

Catherine was even better known for her imagination. I don’t think she ever went to a campaign event without saying it was her third or fourth meeting of the day. This wasn’t a lie by her lights, just a little story. One time at a picnic, Catherine regaled our table with an account of a writers’ convention she went to where she told “Ernest” about something she was writing and “Ernest” gave her some encouraging words. Not wishing to get her in any deeper, we didn’t ask who Ernest was.

The visitors I enjoyed most at the Backstage Bar headquarters were the ward leaders. I still fondly remember Lemmon Gill, Johnnie Fivecoat, Otto Rasche, John Stadler, Joan Fleenor, S. S. Phillips, Harry Orr, and George



**State Senator Catherine R. Dobbs,
1954 campaign photo.**