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Interview with

Adele Blong

Conducted by Alan Houseman

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Alan Houseman:

Hi. I'm Alan Houseman. I'm doing an oral history interview with Adele Blong. This is Friday October 25, 2013. So let's begin with a little background before we get to all the work you've done at the center. Where did you grow up? Where did you go to college? Where did you go to law school? How did you get involved with AGW, and then we'll get to the center.

Adele Blong:

Okay. I grew up in the Bronx. I went to St. John's University College in Brooklyn. And I went to Columbia Law School. I was one of 13 women in a class of 250. So -- but funnily, you know? I was so naïve that I didn't realize until I got into law school that the law at that point was not welcoming to women; they didn't think they needed us. So -- in fact, one of my classmates was Ruth Bader Ginsburg who had also found out the same thing at Harvard where she did very well, but, you know, it was just not -- anyway, but we all -- we all managed. We got through. And then I got to HEW, because when I went to law school, my thought was that I would work for the government. And I came down to Washington, and I started looking for jobs. And I got a job with HEW in the general counsel's office. And I worked for the division that provided advice and assistance to the Social Security Administration. Now that's how I got started. And that was involved more. I stayed there until -- I guess late 1965. I found out from a colleague -- a male colleague -- who whispered to me in the hall, because he didn't want to get into trouble that the deputy regional attorney's job in New
York had opened up, and he knew I wanted to go back to New York.

Unfortunately, not even HEW was free of -- should I say 'prejudice' or whatever -- but reservations about women lawyers. And so, they had contacted this fellow, and perhaps some other men in the office, to find out if they wanted to go to New York, but they had not contacted me who came from New York. [laughing]. But I made it known that I did in fact want to go back to New York. My candidacy was supported by the regional director of the New York office -- Bernice Bernstein -- who had been a lawyer. She started with the department in 1935. She was part of that group of women -- close friend of Elizabeth Wickenden -- that whole group. And she had been regional attorney in New York and then had moved up to regional director. And I had had some contact with her on and off. And so, I guess maybe that -- and other things that maybe it would be too obvious if, having expressed an interest in going to New York, they denied me the opportunity. So they in fact gave in. And I came back to New York where I then became the deputy regional attorney. Again, not right away. I was immediately doing the job of the deputy attorney in terms of supervising the lawyers, doing all the advice. But it took them a while to get around to giving me the title. And there I stayed. We were -- being in the regional office, you worked on all programs. At that point we still had education. It was my first contact with the welfare programs I had while working in the general counsel's office. You know, I knew the welfare lawyers and that sort of thing. Those kinds of conversations was my firsthand work with the welfare programs. And then also the health programs, the
public health stuff that we had to some extent. And I got more and more interested in the welfare side of the issues. I worked very closely with a woman, Florence Acheson -- who I forget what her title was, but she basically was the -- the head of what would have been the welfare division in the regional office. And then, when (?resado?) came along -- and I don't even remember at this point how I ever got the agreement to do it, but I did finally get agreement from the general counsel's office to do an amicus brief in (?resado?), in which we supported the claims of the plaintiffs that 402823 did in fact require an adjustment of the standard of need and that you had to look at what the whole standard was and that sort of thing. So -- and that obviously brought me into contact with Henry and Steve. And then I thought, "Well, this is interesting, you know? This is something I'd like to do." And I went -- my first interview for the job was with George Cooper, who was the faculty director of the Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law. I remember we had lunch at the Columbia faculty club. And I'm trying to remember at that point were they welcoming to women or not? There was a point at which women -- this whole -- this whole transitional period. But I think it was all right for me to eat in the faculty dining room. And George was satisfied, and met with Henry. He was satisfied. And I had to agree to take a pay cut, but I wanted to go there. So I took the pay cut, and I went there. And there I stayed for the rest of my legal career. And I -- I heard Steve's comment about some people who are concerned about a government lawyer. George Wiley -- I
I don't know whether I brought it up with George or he brought it -- I don't know how it came up with --

Alan Houseman:

George Wiley was -- ?

Adele Blong:

George Wiley was the -- what was his title? Basically the executive director of the National Welfare Rights Organization and the -- sort of the spirit -- the driving force behind the organization. And George once had a conversation about it with me, and he said, "You know, people had raised these concerns about a government lawyer." And he just laughed. And, of course, like me to some extent, George came from very straight academic background but found his calling in welfare rights. You know, very -- very different. So that's how I got to the center. And I guess Steve has pretty much gone through our family biography. We met, married, had a -- we have a son. Now have two lovely granddaughters.

Alan Houseman:

Before we get to your casework and your legislative work, just describe the New York office, and when you opened the Washington office, and what that was all about. And then we're going to get here.

Adele Blong:

Oh, okay.

Alan Houseman:

I don't have that yet.
Adele Blong:

Oh, okay. Well, the New York office basically we were doing a lot of litigation in the beginning. And little by little we're getting into legislative issues on the federal level. And more and more like -- I, I guess, was doing a good deal of it. Found myself spending a lot of time on the shuttle going back and forth. And in fact, this is funny side story -- it's how I lost my fear of flying. I was not a very brave flyer, and I used to get on the shuttle sort of white-knuckled. And I remember I got on one night, and I was so tired from the -- because you run down in the morning, then you do your stuff, and you come back at night. And I got on this plane. And we weren't very far along. I mean, I don't know what these things were -- they were probably still turbo props then or something. And the thing started to bounce up and down, up and down. And this young man sitting next to me goes for his barf bag. And the other people around me -- and I had this book. And I just said to myself, "Oh," -- I won't say what I said to myself, but -- "Oh, whatever -- I'm too tired. The pilot is going to have to fly this plane." [laughing]. And that was it from there on in. And they do say "fear of flying -- it's a control thing." I have to admit that was probably a lot of it. But anyway, so that kept going on. And, at the same time, there were a lot of, I think, both people in legal services and other people who thought that we really should have a presence in Washington so we could be on the scene more frequently, have more contacts, and sort of a confluence of events. Steve decided that he wanted to go and work for HEW. That was -- this was -- we married in '76. He decided this, I guess, towards
the end of '76, early '77. I was sort of a dyed-in-the-wool New Yorker. Very glad to be back, and not really looking to ever go away again. But thought, "Well, I would go down and open a Washington office, and we'd see how it went." And we went down there with the naïve belief that, "Oh, we stay four, five years, and then we'd come back to New York." And we went down and we stayed there. And I very quickly realized -- I think I probably was involved maybe in two or three cases after I got there -- not much more than that. Because I quickly realized that it wasn't compatible to both try to deal with the legislative schedule and a litigation schedule. Because the courts didn't care about whether or not you had to go to Congress, and Congress didn't care about whether or not you had to go to court. So I mean -- it just -- there was no way to balance the two. More and more I just pulled back to legislation and doing some writing about welfare issues -- that sort of thing.

**Alan Houseman:**

All right. Why don't we -- you, while you were doing casework, you were involved in a number of cases. And we've talked about a number of them with Henry and Steve. But why don't you talk about the ones that you recall that -- and your role in them and the center's role and a little bit about them. That would, you know -- that you were involved with and had --

**Adele Blong:**

Okay. Well, no -- Steve talked about an outfit -- obviously the first big case after I got to the center was the Medicaid cutback case -- Bass v. Richardson -- and
Braster. And that was -- it was really obviously very exhilarating, especially having, you know, come out of the government and being frustrated at times about not having a lot of ability to change what states were doing. I mean, theoretically HEW was, you know, supervising what states were doing, but there was always this political tension. I mean, how far could you go before there was this pushback, you know, that filtered through Congress back to the agency. And so, you weren't always able necessarily to be certain that you could implement what you thought states were required to do. So the ability to stop this -- this cutback, which we thought was clearly inconsistent with the Medicaid law was -- was really great. And it was also wonderful experience, because I got to interview -- one thing about when we did the cases ourselves, we often met with the clients. And we went out and met with them and talked with them and met with them in their houses. And I still to this day remember so well Morris and Esther Bass, who was a -- they lived up in the Bronx in a -- an apartment complex called Parkchester. And they were just the loveliest people. And he was a Parkinson's -- he had Parkinson's disease. And, you know, what it was going to mean to him -- this Medicaid cutback and the loss of the "el dopa" -- that was the only thing that was keeping him going. And so, the whole experience was just a wonderful experience. And also to have the great good fortune to have a judge like Tenney. I mean, he was just -- I remember the -- the attorneys for New York State trying to argue to him that, you know, this was -- I forget what term they were using. Close to barratry -- something like this -- because this case had been filed in Brooklyn
and now the same issue was being brought here to the southern district of New York. And his asking, you know, "Who had the judge? Who had the case in Brooklyn?" And the judge's name was identified. And he was very respectful, but I think he knew, you know, what we knew that this judge was not really going to move on the matter. And so, he just said something like, "Well, I will speak to Judge" -- I'm forgetting his name, but -- "I will speak to Judge So and So," you know? And, once he said that, we knew we were okay. I mean, he understood this was a very important issue for the people of New York, and he was not going to let it go through the cracks. And it was just -- it was a great way to start, let me say that. [laughing]. And -- and another case obviously was the -- which we didn't have such great success in -- was Aguayo -- Aguayo v. Richardson, which was in -- the use of -- the demonstration project authority under -- under the -- the welfare program where states -- the HEW could grant waivers to states to depart from federal requirements for purposes of projects, programs -- that type of thing. And I mentioned that this morning in the discussion about how courts use the fact of welfare to sort of pull back from a strict application of the law is where I and Judge Friendly parted company. He thought he was applying the APA arbitrary and capricious standard. As -- as it was, I did not. And it's funny -- I took the time in the interval to re-read the case on the computer upstairs. And what he did was, we were applying the standards that had been set out in Citizens -- Overton Park versus Volpe or something like that. It was a case of proving a highway, as I recall, and they were going to tear down people's houses and that. And a decision
was challenged on APA grounds as being arbitrary and capricious. They hadn't considered all the relevant facts. They didn't have a record to demonstrate what they were doing. And so, we made the same exact argument about what HEW did in the way it approved this demonstration project. Let me say a word or two about the demonstration project, which was coming out of the Rockefeller Administration. And I know Steve said earlier that Rockefeller was somewhat moving to the right, and I think this project was another example of that. In addition to the fact that it was going to have a large work relief component, it had a component addressed to children in families receiving AFDC. Teenagers, if they were 15 or older, they were to have a work requirement -- so many hours a week during the school year and other hours during the summer. And the idea was to give them a work experience, but I will never forget -- one of the things -- one of the jobs they were going to do was to polish basketballs. And just the absolute thought of the insult to these kids that they were going to be told to polish basketballs, and that they were also going to be doing this work in front of their classmates. Everyone was going to know who were the kids who were on welfare, because they would be just -- they would be identified for being assigned this work project. And the thought that New York state could contemplate this -- and I don't know what -- what their theoretical basis was. Oh, I guess for them to learn "the value of work," or you know, "the beauty of work" -- some such thing. And their parents -- they're going to have some sort of special requirements -- I don't recall clearly what they were -- for parents of truants, you know? And just -- I
don't -- to me it was just such awful idea that you would indulge this kind of thing using the recipients of welfare benefits as a club. And they also had -- I realize I'm rambling, but -- I will say, what I feel -- one of my best pieces of legal writing was the affidavit of a woman named Hyacinth Cadogan, who lived in Albany. And, under this project, Hyacinth Cadogan was to be assigned to work relief program.

And she had absolutely no objection to doing the work relief program, but she wanted someone to give her money to buy snow boots. She said, "I can't stand out in the snow waiting for the bus to take me to the work project." And that was her whole complaint. And she just -- you know, how you write lawyer's affidavits? I said "No." I just basically wrote Hyacinth Cadogan's story. I tried to just tell it as much like she had told it to me in this phone interview. And, when I re-read the decision today, I realize that there was a challenge to standing in the case. And Judge Friendly goes, "Well, he wasn't certain about all the individuals, if they had standing or not, but he said, "Certainly Hyacinth Cadogan had standing, so that's enough to support the case." [laughing]. I accomplished something. But anyway, he did not accept the APA claim. And, just as in some cases as they say it's a social policy, so it's different here. Was because it was an experimental project, and it was going to be time limited. Now, I don't know -- I don't believe any place else in the development of the law around the Administrative Procedure Act in these claims that the fact something was experimental has been a factor in whether or not you have to follow the same rules. And yet he also at the same time recites at great length that the secretary really didn't provide any record of how this was --
how the demonstration project was reviewed, didn't provide any facts to support his decision -- the whole thing. And so, the only thing that I could draw out of this was, it was welfare. And so, they didn't have to follow the normal agency procedures. So that -- to that extent, it was a loss, but to the extent of what we were trying to accomplish in the case on the ground, it was a 'win', because whether it was a matter of the amount of time it took for the case to work through the courts or what, the state just dropped the project and never went forward. So we at least saved a lot of kids from polishing basketballs.

Alan Houseman:

Just for the audience -- you know, see this in future, who was Judge Friendly, and why was he important?

Adele Blong:

Okay. Henry Friendly was at that point chief judge on the second circuit, New York, which was probably one of the most influential courts in the country along with the ninth circuit. And he was probably the most influential judge on the second circuit. So what he said had a whole lot of effect. So that was that. Another case, which we won but then -- well, start at the beginning. Crane -- Crane v. Matthews was another Medicaid case which I was involved with -- Georgia Legal Services -- which gave me my one and only trial experience. I -- the claim we raised -- one of the claims we raised, and the claim I worked on -- was the human experimentation claim. Since this was having to do with medical procedures and was going to apply a co-payment, we challenge -- and it was under
a demonstration project -- we challenged it on two grounds (1) co-payments is being inconsistent with the Medicaid Act, but also since it was a demonstration project, it was experimentation. HEW had these human experimentation procedures that required -- they had to be reviewed by something called an Institutional Review Board if it involved a human subject. Obviously, these were human subjects. These were people who were receiving Medicaid, and now their ability to get the Medicaid was going to be in question because they couldn't get it unless they had a co-payment. So we worked on -- in that case, and there was a -- HEW sent -- there was a trial actually on it. And HEW sent down a gentleman from their demonstration project office to testify in the trial to make -- support their argument that it was not human experimentation. And the Georgia lawyers handled the rest of the trial, but I did the cross-examination of the HEW witness. And it was -- in a way it was satisfying, because I established what I had to establish. It also -- I felt so sorry for this man, because clearly in his heart he agreed with me [laughing], but he knew that wasn't what he was supposed to say. And so, it was a real -- you could see this -- this sort of tension on his part to try to, you know, avoid being drawn into saying what obviously was going to support the claim. And he was drawn into it, and the court agreed with us that it was human experimentation, and the project had to be sent back to be reviewed by an Institutional Review Board. And again, that was the end of it. I mean, the state gave up the project. But unfortunately, that was not the end of the human experimentation issue, because HEW had involved itself in a long process, which I
lost track of at some point, in which they basically pulled back on the human experimentation and limited it much more strictly to the clearly biologically -- biologic, medical-type procedures and just took it -- took demonstration projects and welfare and other things like that completely out of the picture. So we got to use it a little bit for a couple of years, and then they took it away. So. And the one other case thing -- I don't know if Steve mentioned this -- was our New York City reasonable promptness case, Perez v. Levine, where the newspapers are reporting these great long lines waiting to get into welfare centers in the Bronx. And we actually went up there and -- 5:00 in the morning -- saw the people out on the street. It was wintertime. They were burning fires in the trash cans to try to keep warm. We got into -- we went into the welfare center when they went in to document the fact that they couldn't get applications and stuff. I was taking pictures. I had my camera confiscated by a welfare guard. [laughing]. I later got it back, but I didn't get the film back. That caused a little furor with the New York City agency, but -- but that was a very interesting case also. And, as in so many cases, we actually -- though we were suing New York City, we were at the same time getting some help from, of course -- we actually suing the state, I guess, and the city at the same time, because they really didn't have the resources to deal with the cases. And we did prevail in that case; they had to give applications to people -- not instantly, which was what we wanted, but at least within a week. If you showed up, you had to get an interview and you had to get an application within a week, which was a lot better than what was going on. So that was -- that was very
satisfying. Though, unfortunately, as I read the -- the bulletins that come out of the National Center for Law and Economic Justice, I realize that there are still cases around the country on providing aid with reasonable promptness. And the essential dilemma is -- you know the agency officials are doing this to limit intake and to save money, but if you hold them in contempt, then, you know, you may do more damage than you do good. So it's -- it's a -- it's a very hard issue to deal with.

Alan Houseman:

You move down in '77, was it?

Adele Blong:

Yeah -- late '77.

Alan Houseman:

And let's talk a little bit about some of the legislative work you did. Let's start first before you move down -- you mentioned you were going back and forth -- and then after you moved down. So I don't know if before you moved down you were talking about the Family Assistance Act or SSI or any of that.

Adele Blong:

No.

Alan Houseman:

I don't know. It doesn't matter, and we don't have to, you know. I just want to get into you talking a little bit about the legislative work you've done.

Adele Blong:

Okay. Okay.
Alan Houseman:

Any way you want.

Adele Blong:

Okay. Now actually, interestingly enough, I was still on HEW when FAP was on the table. And so, though the center took a position against FAP, I forget her name -- Lucy something -- wrote the long thing about it. I was at HEW, I was looking at FAP, and I thought it was good step, but I was hoping it would get enacted and it didn't. And I think perhaps some of the people who opposed even from the, you know, the then "other side" were opposing FAP came in later years to think maybe that was a mistake. I think it was a political calculation. They thought that by pushing they would get more, and instead they got less. But.

Alan Houseman:

What did FAP do?

Adele Blong:

Oh -- well, it was basically going to replace the AFDC program with a wholly different program of assistance. And I -- I -- I couldn't remember at this point what the details were.

Alan Houseman:

But it was guaranteed income.

Adele Blong:

Yeah. Yeah. But I guess they were pushing for additions to that and other sorts of things. But an interesting thing -- and I thought about this this morning. And does
-- it has to do with the work I did, because obviously I came down -- Moynihan was then in the Senate, was on the finance committee, along with Russell Long, who was the chair of the finance committee. And, though in some ways probably I and people like me should have been on the same side with Moynihan, we never worked together. His -- his chief aid on the welfare stuff, a guy called Chester Finn, Checker Finn, I think didn't -- you know, we obviously talked and that, but I didn't really put a lot of trust in us. And I think that was the residue with the fact that Moynihan never got over the fact of the attack on FAP that had come out of the center. And so, there was -- there was always that tension there and that sort of thing. And then what we did -- you know, when I first came down, they were the great days, you know? The Carter Administration. Jim Corman was the chair of the Subcommittee on Public Assistance, which was within the Ways and Means Committee. Wilbur Mills was the chair of the Ways and Means committee. I think probably something a lot of people don't know about Wilbur Mills, because he -- you know, he's always associated with the bigger issues, but he was very, very open to progress in the welfare programs. And so, things were, you know, going well. And I don't remember the specifics of particular proposals, but we got -- we got some work expense stuff through, improvements in the work expense, provisions in the work programs, other positive things were going through. And then, of course, along came the election of 1980. Jim Corman lost. The House was still democratic, and there still was a good -- you know, we still had a good chairman in terms of -- God, I'm not going to blank on his name.
Alan Houseman:

(=Russ Krakowski?). Was it Dan?

Adele Blong:

No, Dan was Ways and Means Committee. But I'm thinking Public Assistance Committee was the fella from Tennessee. Oh, his son came to Congress after him. Oh, it's embarrassing, but.

Alan Houseman:

Ford.

Adele Blong:

Yes, Ford -- Ford. Now, if I can think of his first name. What the heck. He was a good chairman too. But still, obviously, the big thing that happened in 1980 was the election of Ronald Reagan. And so, we no longer had a friendly administration, that's for sure. And so, things just started getting much harder. So, from then on, a lot of what we worked on was more defensive work. And -- you know, it's when we started to hear also the topic that came up today -- we didn't use that word -- they talked about another word that was used about welfare, but "dependency." "Dependency" became the code word for what was wrong with welfare. And there was a guy, I guess he was Carleson, who was Reagan's welfare person for a while. And that's all he did. He went around talking about "Welfare was bad, because welfare made people dependent, and dependency was bad."

Now the fact we're talking about something where we're like -- I don't know -- 90% or more of the people were children -- I mean, that didn't seem -- you know,
it didn't seem to get into people's heads. What would you expect children to be?

But we were just sort of -- they were very clever, as I think a lot of people of that political stripe had been very clever in finding a code word that had a negative connotation with people. You didn't even have to say anything, but, you know, in this country of independence and entrepreneurial spirit, to say that something made people dependent and that there was a culture of dependency, you didn't have to say another word. That was it in and of itself. That meant it was something bad and it should be changed. And I remember we tried so hard to get people to understand, "No, it's not 'dependency' to help people when they need help." And, of course, we wrote all these myths, booklets about the truth about AFDC. You know, the turnover in the program. There was only a small percentage -- less than 25% of the people who stayed on for long periods of time. We wrote a lot of things -- pamphlets and informational material. But we used in Congress and other places about welfare benefits. And, you know, the absurdity of how little people were given to live on. And -- but the tide was running against us. And -- but we kept going, and it's funny -- I heard Steve say something about Russell Long questioning whether or not he should be working on these issues at HEW. At the same time I had -- I just banned -- we just had rented space in Washington. The first couple of months I worked out of our apartment we didn't have space yet. So we just rented space. And I remember I was sitting there preparing testimony for the Public Assistance Subcommittee. I was at a desk. And I was literally surrounded by boxes, because we hadn't had time to unpack yet
or anything. And a legal services lawyer -- whose name I won't mention -- came in, and he was in Washington. And he was there on a mission to tell me that he didn't believe that I should be there representing welfare recipients in Congress, because how could I be doing the kind of job I should be doing when my husband was working for HEW? [laughing]. I just -- I think I just said to him -- "His name, just get out, please. I'm busy here." As I'm trying to get this testimony written in between boxes. So we were getting it from both sides. It was a very interesting time. But anyway, on the legislation -- we kept on. And then, of course, we -- I guess, Clinton, you know, got elected. And we thought, "Oh, good times are back again." And, of course, I guess we should have paid more attention to his campaign slogan to "change welfare as we know it" or something -- whatever.

**Alan Houseman:**

End welfare.

**Adele Blong:**

"End welfare as we know it" -- yeah. And they started working on ending welfare as we know it. And we -- we fought the good fight -- myself and a lot of others, people from (class?) also, for at least one term meeting with the HEW and people on the Hill and pointing out all the problems that would be raised by time limiting benefits and all the rest of it. And we -- oh, trying to remember some of this stuff. Again, worked on various papers about the reality of who was on welfare. But the second term came along and we had lost it. I mean, they -- TANF was enacted. It was like, you know -- it was a tide that was coming, and that was, you know --
they enacted it and that was the end of AFDC and beginning, I think, of a lot of problems, which I don't know when we're going to see the effect of them in terms of the children that are out there who aren't getting what they need. And I just -- I just had a thought escaping me for a moment. Oh, I know -- maybe this is more political than I should be saying, but I've been interested lately in hearing some commentators talk about the difference between Obama and Clinton, and one of the things they point out is, after the government shut down and everything and then Clinton turned around, he was able to work successfully with the Republican Congress in his second term. And, while I have a great deal of admiration for both Hillary and Bill Clinton, I still have to say that, from my standpoint in all honesty, he had a great deal of success in his second term, because he was doing what the Republican Congress wanted. And so, obviously, if he's willing to play their game, they were going to play his game. So.

Alan Houseman:

I don't know -- one -- two of the things that -- that the center did was training and Steve talked a little bit about that. And I don't know if you want to say anything about that. Also you and others there wrote numerous articles for the legal aid community besides writing articles for the people on the Hill.

Adele Blong:

Yeah. Yeah.
Alan Houseman:

Wrote articles about, you know, that the legal aid community used in their advocacy.

Adele Blong:

Yeah.

Alan Houseman:

So I don't know if you want to say a word or two about that.

Adele Blong:

You know, just as you said, we did write them. And it was our way of trying to multiply what effect we could have. You know, if we could -- if we could come up with an argument that could be useful to sort of, you know, ”throw your bread upon the waters” -- we were throwing our bread upon the waters, getting it out there, trying to spread it around to, you know, get as many people as possible to pick up the issues and to run with them. And the training was always enjoyable, because -- since we were a back-up center, we would have written communications and telephone communications with people all around the country. And it was always fun to finally go to a meeting and put a face on the name. And so, that -- that was enjoyable. And it's a lot of -- lot of feedback and pro's and con's. I think we -- we did some good work. I think we did -- maybe in some ways we accomplished more than we thought we did -- I don't know. You know, incrementally -- little things here and there. And maybe we educated some people. I remember -- it's funny -- I talk just one more little anecdote about both a
case and a legislative issue. In looking, when Allen asked me to put together a list of cases, I came across a case I'd completely forgotten, which was a case in California on what was called "prior month budgeting." The idea that you -- you determined somebody's grant not on the basis of what income they have, say, in the month of June, but income that they received in April. And it's a whole whacky thing, but it came out of the Reaganites in California. We litigated this case in California with the California lawyers. I wasn't there personally. I worked on the brief -- that sort of thing. And I read this judge's decision recently. I re-read it when I saw the case. And he got it. He went through step by step how ridiculous it was if this program was supposed to meet current needs that you would look back two months and decide what people should get in June based on what they had in April. And I thought, I mean, "This is marvelous. He got it." We worked so hard to try to explain to Congress why this made absolutely no sense. And they acted like it was so complicated they couldn't understand it. And I remember a big pusher of this retrospective budgeting thing -- for reasons that I don't fully understand -- was a commissioner -- and I better be careful, because I'm not remembering at this point whether he was Michigan or Wisconsin; I think it might have been Michigan. There was a conference, and I spoke at the conference. And I was going to speak on retrospective budgeting, prior to month budgeting. And I started off by saying, "This provision presents the simple question of 'Can I feed my children today with money I had two months ago?'" And this man exploded -- I mean, he was so angry, because he didn't like the fact that that was
the basic truth. I mean, he didn't want to admit that that's basically what he was doing. And they eventually, you know, adopted retrospective budgeting provisions. First HEW tried to do it by regulation. And then, finally, they got it in the statute. And they never ever faced up to the ridiculous nature of what they were doing. You could have gone to a kid in the first grade and that child would have understood what was wrong about this.

Alan Houseman:

All right. Let's end with -- Henry and I had a discussion about the national support case, when it was brought -- and I know that you worked on this.

Adele Blong:

Yep.

Alan Houseman:

So just end up with anything you want to say about that and anything you want to say about the Legal Services Corporation and some of your interactions with them.

Adele Blong:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, the legal services case, I will say, that finally the APA argument won [laughing]. That was the main prop in that case. Richard -- Rick Cotton represented the centers, and we argued that the corporation, you know, was taking this action against back-up centers without having any record, without having looked into the facts -- you know, just the classic arbitrary and capricious argument. And DC circuit bought it. And so that -- I finally had that satisfaction
and finally seen an agency held accountable sort of on my watch for -- for it. So that was very satisfying.

**Alan Houseman:**

You did work on the case.

**Adele Blong:**

Oh yeah -- yeah, I worked -- both Florence Roisman, who was then with the housing center, and I both worked on the case with her. Yes. My son was -- it's a very vivid fall, because we worked on it in the fall of '83, and he was a baby at that point. And I -- you know, days -- I was only working part-time. So days when I would normally be home, I brought him into -- I forget what firm Rick was with in downtown Washington.

**Alan Houseman:**

I know the office (inaudible).

**Adele Blong:**

Yeah. Yeah. And he had one of these little things that you sit in and roll around in. He was rolling around their offices while we were working on the case. But I think Rick had sometimes thought slightly askance that I wasn't a good mother, because I was dragging my son out here. But he survived. And then also worked with -- again, with Allen and a lot of other people in legal services on various legislative initiatives to get funding for legal services, to try to deal with some of the arbitrary actions that were being taken by the Legal Services Corporation. And it was all very worthwhile work. I think, you know, we -- we certainly
bought -- we thought maybe we're going to accomplish more than we did accomplish, but we certainly did buy a lot of time. I think we kept legal services as a very active advocacy force for poor people for a lot longer than would have been so if some of the powers that be had had their way. So I think it was all very worthwhile and hopefully it planted the seeds for some sort of rebirth.

Alan Houseman:

Well, thanks. It's been a great interview, and we appreciate you.

Adele Blong:

Thank you.

Alan Houseman:

Thank you very much.

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