BP: This is an oral history interview with Leanna Gipson. I’m Brian Paddock and this is being done on July 24, 1991. We’re here at the Don Caesar for the southeast projects directors meeting. Leanna, why don’t we with you telling us a little bit about who you are and how you came to be in Legal Services.

LG: Well who I am, gee that’s a hard one, I would rather leave that for a different tape. How I came into Legal Services. Well I was living in Washington, D.C. I started in 1970, the year before Antioch started up and I started at Howard University and I went to law school because my husband was an activist in the community and there was also a lot of possibility that we would move around a lot. And so I was trying to think of what, I didn’t want to get into teaching because you really have to stay stable, it felt like to do that. So I thought well gee my mother had told since I was a little child that I should be a lawyer. So I decided to go to law school and I wanted to go to Howard, had started there and then very seriously the second year I can remember when I first heard about Antioch, heard about it starting up and thinking boy that really sounds terrific. But I would have to take my first year of law school over again. So I think I quickly dropped that thought and stayed at Howard, thought I really was going to stay in the Washington community for at least a number of years. We lived in the heart of D.C. and my husband worked with a lot of low income people in his parish. I had just assumed that I would really not go into
Legal Services but in a rather stay in my community and provide legal services to the people in like the people in our church, a lot of GS1s, GS2s, janitors, secretaries, both people working in the family and just barely making it by. And then I was fortunate enough to clerk right after I finished law school and clerked for two years, again thinking that this was a great way to set up practice in Washington, D.C. and then the week that I finished my clerkship in 1976 moved to Nashville, Tennessee, which kind of undercut many of the things that I had tried to put into place so that I could do the kind of work I really wanted to do in D.C. When I moved to Nashville I guess I really had to think about what kind of law I wanted to practice. I mean before I knew who I wanted to serve, you know it was the people in our neighborhood and in our church, and I moved to Nashville and I didn’t have that connection with the community, and had to really think about what kind of law I wanted to practice. The only place that I applied in Nashville was with Legal Services of Middle Tennessee and it took me about 11 months to get a job there. When I first went, well I don’t know why it took me 11 months but from my perspective I first went there and I sent them my resume and was told by Ashley Wiltshire who had not too recently become the director there, that they didn’t have any positions open and then I did a lot of work in the community and did some ad campaigns for the League of Women Voters around school issues and things like that, volunteer work and then finally got a call back from Ashley saying he had two positions open, a consumer law attorney and this state support director and when I asked him to just describe the jobs it was real clear what the consumer law attorney was going to do. It was a little unclear what the state support director was going to do. It was a brand new position. They had a small grant. They had recently fired the person that they had initially
hired for the project. So I of course went after the consumer law attorney position and
didn’t get it. He offered me a position at $11,500, $6,000 less than I had been making in
D.C. to become the director of the state support office in Tennessee and I took it.

**BP:** About when was this?

**LG:** 1977. In fact I think the day that he offered me the job, he had called me into
his office and I walked in and his office is a corner office that looks over the courthouse
in downtown Nashville and I walked into his office and I looked behind him and the flags
were at half mast and I hadn’t caught the news that morning, I had to get my kids off to
school and everything and I didn’t know who died. And I remember my heart starting to
thump because all of us had been through the Kennedy assassinations and the
assassination of Martin Luther King and I can just remember my heart started to thump
and I looked at him and I said who died. And he just kind of got this weird look on his
face, Elvis Presley had died that day and all of the flags in Nashville were at half mast.
That was the day that I was hired into Legal services, the day Elvis Presley died.

**BP:** Well some people have called the timing of state support activities that you
were involved in the second wave. What do you think of that characterization, does that
fit your recollections?

**LG:** I think that’s really true. I mean I was not around in Legal Services in the
beginning for the first wave. I now happen to be with a program that has a state support
office who was in that first wave attached to it and I certainly do see differences and I
think that I was pretty much aware of those differences back then, just from the stories
and the information that I had received when I first came into Legal Services. I mean
from my perspective I didn’t really go about, let me just back up a little bit. When I came
into Nashville I mean it pretty much really was true that there was no office there. They had had a grant I think for a little over a year and had hired someone and that person didn’t work out. And then they had looked around for somebody else but when I walked into the office there were no plans, there were no projects, there were no files, there basically was nothing. And so I spent a lot of the first few months going around to each of the projects. At that time there were five projects I believe in the state, no, six, Neil McBride had just started up Rural Legal Services of Tennessee, I think it was just a few months old. So I went around to those projects and talked with the directors, talked with the staff, understanding at that point that my job was to figure out ways that we could work on statewide issues, impact work, projects, ways in which by having some kind of coordination the work that was being done in the field could be maximized. And I think because I had not been in Legal Services previously and came into an office where there were already people with four, five, six years experience my perspective of state support really was one of there are experts already out there in local programs doing good work and staying connected to the community and that it didn’t make sense pulling them out of where they were to a central location. Not only did it not make sense but it was clear that the people who hired me weren’t going to let me do that. So I mean it was a meshing of political reality with what I really did think would work best in this setting. You know there is a lot of fierce independence in the south and I’m not sure the models that worked in Michigan and New York and Massachusetts and California would work in the south. Jurisdictions were fiercely independent. So basically what we started doing was just identifying who the resources were around the state and then setting up systems to see to it that those resources got shared with more than just their local program. And trying to
take care of the political issues of one program providing more resources than everybody
else and feeling drained and making sure that new people who came into Legal Services
got an active role in that whole process. My own vision was, I mean I came into Legal
Services what felt late, I mean 1977 and that really did feel late because the people A.C.
Wharton, Ashley, Gordon Bonnyman, Jerry Black, those people had been around since
‘69 and ‘70, and my own sense was that my office was a support office and that the kind
of leadership that we were to play was more of a kind of leadership where you don’t
necessarily figure out what’s right you figure out how to do it. I mean there were folks in
the field who knew what the issues were and knew how to litigate and how to do
legislative and administrative advocacy and how to train but they were simply stuck in
their own local parochial places not necessarily of their own choosing either. I don’t
mean yo imply that I was the only one who saw this vision but people were real busy and
no one had the time to think about how do you connect all this up together. It was also
very fortuitous; I think there are two major three major themes that I find fascinating in
reflection. One is the fact that several very key state support directors at that time were
women. That we all started up in around the same southeast region, that we all saw
support in the same kind of way and set up many of the same kind of systems. And I’ll
talk a little bit more a little bit later. And the second you know theme that I see as being
really impacted on my development in Legal Services was the whole expansion area. I
came into Legal Services in ‘77. State support exploded over the next five years. Legal
Services exploded over the next five years in terms of moving from the urban centers
around the country into the rural counties and of course minimum access. And the third
thing that I think really impacted was the Reagan election and the Omnibus budget can’t
even remember the name of it now, the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1981 or whatever it was and the whole refocus of attention back on the states and back on state legislatures and state agencies and state law and the role that state support had to play in that and the leadership and responsibility that people had to take in that was fortuitous and necessary. And so for me those are the three big things that I see as shaping my history with state support.

**BP:** What would be a snapshot of the before and after in state support in terms of what had existed and then you talk about an expansion and explosion and what triggered this new wave.

**LG:** Well, I see history from a middle layer and so you know I was not in at the national level on any of the behind the doors planning and I don’t know what they thought they were doing but from my perspective things got in some ways meshed together. There was a lot of talk around training and quality issues. There was not a tension but there was a whole group of people who were really concerned with the quality of Legal Services and the training and coordination aspects necessary to impact on quality. So you had Dick Carter at LSC and Bea Moulton and that whole I mean I can still remember when they restructured training basically to replicate what we had already been doing in the south across the country. But they came in then, I know this is a little bit of digression, but just to show you how it meshed, Rona Hobson Roberts who was in Kentucky and who really started up the first, I mean copied much of what the state support center in Tennessee became from her. When I came on the job she I think had started up in Kentucky the year before and she was the first person I called. And she had thought a lot about training and task forces and the coordination of a variety of very
distinct and different programs. And so a lot of my first thoughts really got clarified and focused through Rona. And then there was her name just flew out of my head, Marilyn Swears in Alabama who was and is just an incredible training coordinator. And so for the first several years we had worked together to do trainings. After my first couple of years of doing basic lawyering skills and substantive training in Tennessee it was clear that I could not continue to do these kinds of things every year on my own. Once you do that first round and get everyone who hasn’t been trained in the last five years and you get caught up with yourself then you’re talking about you know maybe having five to 11 people every year in your state who need new lawyer training or who need paralegal training or who need this, that or the other and so it became very clear to us early that we needed to work together and I think I was trying to think when the first multi-state training was that we created and I can’t remember but I know it was before the what was the acronym for that it was before Bea Moulton and crew came in to reorganize training around the country. CORT, it was before CORT, C-O-R-T I hadn’t thought about this, can’t even think of what the acronym stood for now. But we had been doing this for at least a couple of years and had pretty much trained, done all our basic packages together, so that everybody in a three or four or five state part of the region had had basic lawyering training, basic paralegal and some other basic components. Then Washington came in, set up these CORT committees and basically said that all the training money for the next couple of years was going to into core curricula, basic lawyering skills training, basic paralegal training, and these other basic components which we had just finished and we were ready to move on to the second tier you know folks who had been in Legal Services for thee, four and five years and hadn’t gotten any training. We were furious.
And they wouldn’t budge. The money was there the first couple of years for BLAST and I can’t remember the acronym for paralegal training

**BP:** BLAST is the Basic Lawyer

**LG:** Basic Lawyer Skills Training and then there was an acronym for the paralegal training, I can’t think what that was. And you know we tried to explain to them that we understood their plan, it was a great plan, we started it four years ago and we were four years down the road on it now and that this would basically mean that we had no training that met our needs for a couple of years, at least no money from Washington that was going to meet those. So you know that again I say that was my view of history is that we had in this region, in the southeast region I think in large part because of not just state support but because of the long history in this region of meeting, of working together. I mean I would never have met Marilyn and some of the other state support directors if it hadn’t been for these regional meetings that took place in those days four times a year from the very beginning the state support directors were invited and participated in that. So from the very beginning I had an opportunity at least four times a year to meet with my peers and people who did the same kind of work that I did and of course when we came to these meetings we didn’t sit in on a lot of the workshops that they had for directors because we didn’t have a program of attorneys, we didn’t have those kinds of programs to run. So we would get together and have our own little meetings and talk about training and legislative and administrative advocacy and coordination and how you politically you work with seven or eleven very distinct project directors, usually all of whom were men, with most of us being women. And so that whole history from the southeast region of coming together and taking the best and
assigning tasks, we took back to our states and started the same things, task forces. So I mean in many ways we simply looked around us and saw what worked and just took it back home and did it. So my sense of history, my recollection was from a parochial perspective was that Washington was a step late with us. I understood it was good for the rest of the country and it was nice that they did recognize the need to coordinate training and to provide basic skills and to do things like that, but boy I can remember those early years when we were so furious with the fact that we had been out in front and it felt like ended up getting punished for that instead of rewarded. The opposite flip though happened with the Budget Reconciliation Act at least for me and I guess I shouldn’t speak for the other state support directors but I really think the leadership that Washington took on that and if you’ll remember they had set up regional meetings and I think the southeast region was one of the first ones, again because of our history. We had a whole history of meeting and so it wasn’t unusual for us to come together but the entire three-day workshop was focused on the Budget Reconciliation Act.

**BP:** This was after Ronald Reagan was elected President.

**LG:** That’s right. This was about ‘82.

**BP:** And the federal government goes in to a lot of cutbacks in programs

**LG:** That’s right, that just decimated huge portions of the federal program.

Pushed a lot of options onto the state discretionary items onto the state. And Alan Houseman and I don’t know who else was involved but I remember Alan because I remember and I remember Victory Geminiani. I remember that southeast meeting where people were very discouraged coming into that meeting and we spent three days listening to, they had experts from backup centers coming in and telling us exactly what it meant
for Food Stamps and what it meant for AFDC and what it meant for Social Security and had broken it down and analyzed it. So you know we could sit there and think through and I think each session ended with brainstorming around well as lawyers what’s our response to this, as advocates where are the pieces then. And the last day was spent with your state and I believe the state support, at least in my state and I think it happened in each of the other caucuses the state support director facilitated that last day. And we had been given instructions on a little sheet of paper and everything. And the whole thought was to brainstorm what had to happen in your state. What decisions did we want the local state administration to make in terms of choosing different options, in terms of their discretionary powers now. You know getting us to think about moving a lot of our advocacy to the state courts instead of the federal courts. I mean just I think that leadership, that insight into what had happened to us nationally and what was necessary to move us off our depression was just critical. And I know in Tennessee we developed a plan that last day and turned around and went home and did it. And I don’t mean the state support office, I mean the projects in the state of Tennessee and we developed task forces and we did a lot of legislative and administrative work. And we didn’t do it by having two or three lobbyists in Nashville. We did have one person who worked in the legislature the three months that the legislature met. But we also hired a person whose primary responsibility was just coordinating the task forces. Peter . . . robski and that was another, someone should interview Peter sometime because that was another time where exactly the right person was picked to do something that I don’t think had really been done before. And that was to be responsible for integrating the by this time 15-year folks in Legal Services, the Gordon Bonnymans, the Brian Paddocks, the Russ Overbys, the
can’t think of all the people now. With all this new wave of young attorneys who were coming in right out of law school and paralegals. And Peter would spend about six hours of his day on the phone just calling folks up checking in on what was happening on their cases. If you walked into Peter’s office you would see those little yellow Post-its everywhere on his desk, on his chair arm, on his wall, you know reminding himself don’t forget so and so is doing this case and wanted to know about that and this, that and the other. And Peter kept his finger on the pulse of about four task forces and when there was enough stuff bubbling he would then call the meeting and set the agenda, pull everybody in, facilitate the meeting, make sure tasks were assigned. I think Tennessee was the first state, I’m not positive about this, I think we were the first state to really do what I call coordinated litigation. Again not on the old model where the case would be shipped into the state support office and the experts in the state support office would handle it. But the second wave model and that was where the task force that was facilitated by the state support office handled the litigation basically and I know you were involved in a couple of those cases where we would have an attorney from Memphis and somebody from Nashville and somebody from rural and a paralegal from south central and maybe another paralegal from upper east and they would all have assignments and somebody would be responsible for pulling together affidavits and somebody would do legal research on one cause of action and somebody else would do the research on another cause of action and literally co-counsel cases with three, four, five different programs from across the state. And before I left there I know that we handled four or five major pieces of litigation that way and I’m very proud of that because I think that was exactly the way to do it in Tennessee. I don’t know about any place else but I think it was exactly the way. And it
was the way to do it not just for the clients it was the way to do it for the advocates. I mean new people got to work with Gordon and you and other folks, and you and Gordon and the other folks got these new whippersnappers to come in and tell you were full of shit some of the time you know And it was marvelous. It was a way in which everybody got better I think, rather than shipping the case off. So I’m very proud of and very feel very fortunate to have fallen into the place that I did so that I got to participate in that.

**BP:** Let me go back a minute and go over the resource curve because

**LG:** What resource curve?

**BP:** It seems to me like there was the creation of these new state support units at a time there was expansion in the field and then you mentioned hiring, for example, Peter at the time of the . . . cutbacks but Legal Services itself was facing cutbacks. It wasn’t like they gave you more money and helped to solve the problems that were presented by the cutbacks in all the other federal programs. So maybe we ought to go back and replay a little of that history of what you had to work with over this.

**LG:** Gee I’m sure I’ll get very confused about this so when I started, my recollection is when I started the budget was something like $40,000. Actually I think the first year was more like $25,000 because it was just myself and a secretary. Then I think the second year in ‘78 which was when I really got involved in expansion I think our budget went up to about $40,000 and I hired a person, Bill Haley, who helped with expansion in the area. We had been called by the regional office. Tennessee I think had something like 40 or 50 counties that were not served by Legal Services offices in 1978, and you know again I think our region was very proactive. Michael Terry was in the regional office at the time and Guyla Skoe was working there also and I think one of the
legacies of Michael Terry that people have no idea what benefit was gained was his
decision back in ‘77 ‘78 that there was a minimum amount of core program that you
needed to go and that he was not going to allow three and four attorney offices
organizations to start up in the whole southeast region. My recollection was that his
minimum was $500,000 for a program. And in those days that was a lot of money and so
expansion in the southeast took a lot of time and a lot of arm-twisting because it meant
getting a lot of counties to work together to make that critical mass. But I think that that
has to this day had a lasting affect on the quality and stability of those offices. So
anyway I hired Bill Haley and my recollection was that Bill was not a full-time he was
full-full but was not a permanent employee, in other words we had a project and we had
enough money to hire him for a couple of years. And then again I think because of the
leadership in my recollection was that at the national level Victor got very involved in
state support and started seeing what was happening in the southeast region and a few
other places and liked that model and saw it combined with expansion and then later
combined with the shift to the state in terms of a lot of the legal work that we needed to
do. You know just saw the need to have some coordinating force in there and I think I
don’t know who else was involved but I think there was a real push at the national level.
Certainly Alan Houseman was very interested. The first time I ever saw John Arango I
was at a conference in Washington, it was that huge, what was it called, back in ‘78 or
‘79 we had regional conferences about future issues in Legal Services and then people
were kind of appointed or elected to go to Washington and do the same thing over again.
And I can’t remember the name of that wave of conferences. But I was in a small group
of John Arango and I knew that I wanted to go to Washington to get more funding for
state support and I had worked out a cost analysis and it was my estimate that state support should be funded at about four percent of the field funding for the state. So I went to this conference and we were sitting in small groups and he wanted to know what people’s proposals were. My hand went up immediately, I had been in Legal Services like two years or two and a half years or something like that, and I said well I think state support should be funded at four percent of the field base. And no analysis, didn’t lay out any . . . or anything else and John was quite taken aback and said a few things which I think initially at least got me off on the wrong foot with John Arango which got straightened out later on, but you know clearly just beginning in the ‘78 ‘79 era to look at state support and to look at the funding that was necessary. And just before the Reagan cuts there was a substantial increase in funding. My recollection is that we went up fairly significantly right before the Reagan cuts, then got cut and through ‘82 through ‘84 when I left our budget was around $180,000 for the entire office. And with that I think we had about three or four full-time staff persons including Stewart Clifton who is now the director there and other folks who had specific assignments but again didn’t replicate not the substantive expertise rather we tried to pull people into the state support office who had skills that were not always available in the programs like the not just skills but job descriptions that were not replicated in the local field offices like somebody responsible for coordinating a substantive task force, somebody responsible for coordinating training around the state, somebody responsible for coordinating legislative and administrative advocacy. So when you say the curve of resources I’m now in a program which is a little over $3 million and I look back and I think sometimes it feels like I did a lot more with $180,000 than I’m doing now with $3 million.
**BP:** But then you were faced with cutbacks and as I recall the newer state support units like the one you started and operated never did have resources in proportion to the constituent programs and client populations that some of the original state support units had had, Massachusetts Law Reform, Western Center of Law and Poverty in California, Michigan had a big unit.

**LG:** The office that I’m in now has one of the original state support centers, Greater Upstate Law Project whose budget for this year is just slightly under a million dollars. And I’m sure that Stewart is probably still operating on around $180,000-$200,000. And I’m sure that there is not that disproportionate amount of clients between the two states, especially since GULP’s LSC grant doesn’t cover New York City, so you’re only really talking about upstate New York. So that the differences in resources is another reason why the way we do thing was right but my recollection is that isn’t really why. We didn’t choose to coordinate rather than to establish substantive experts because of the resources. We chose it because that was what seemed to really work at least in Tennessee. It so happened that we would never had had the money to do the experts anyway but I really don’t remember that as being the motivation for the decisions that we made. But it’s certainly true. We could do certainly a lot more in training, a lot more in administrative and legislative advocacy than we do now if we had more balanced resources. I think the other thing, let me just mention, the other thing I think we do in the south differently is we work with clients and client organizations and in a partnership that I think is different than it is at least in the state of New York. I won’t speak for any place else. And if we had more resources I think that would look very different also. And I
think that the benefits of that client involvement would be much greater if we had more resources in the south and in other places around the country.

**BP**: That’s been true probably of programs generally that they’ve fallen on hard times in terms of their ability to relate as broadly and effectively with the client community as they might like. That would be my suspicion, is that your perception or

**LG**: Well again it’s difficult for me to follow that issue because I moved from the south up to the north where historically I don’t believe there has been the same kind of client involvement and so it’s hard for me to judge whether it’s because I’m in New York that this is happening or because times are changing or resources are changing, it’s been very hard for me to analyze that. There is not the community relationship and that’s not quite the right word. There are not the links and that’s not the right word either. There is something I felt working in the south that I don’t feel up north. There is a connection to the client community that I don’t feel up north. There is it’s very difficult for me to analyze it and describe it but I feel as though the community up north is less interested in us, it’s almost as if we no matter what we do, I’m not sure it’s our fault, it’s that we are not as core and central a moving force in the whole panoply of players as we are down south. I mean down south in so many areas this is it, you know this is it and everybody knows this is it and everybody knows there Legal Services office and I just don’t get that same sense at all where I am now.

**BP**: I think it’s worthy of a whole other discussion and

**LG**: Not state support.
BP: You mentioned earlier that having women in the managerial and leadership roles was one of the important context elements of this. Tell me a little bit more about your reflections on that.

LG: Well I wish I had been 47 when I started in state support then I would have been more reflective and would have maybe tested some of this stuff out. Now as I look back and look back on my own life and my own development and am much more aware of gender issues and differences and things like that, I suspect and reflect on things that I’m not sure I was really aware then. It seems to me and I don’t mean by any of my comments that I think there is an inherent difference in the way men and women think or care or work but it is certainly true that we are molded greatly by the messages that we receive and the roles that we are at least at some points in our lives forced to play. And so when I reflect I really see the ways in which we developed state support the way especially the women who were involved in that development were very typical what I would call female ways of working. And again not inherently but because we had been delegated forced or whatever depending on your political beliefs verb you want to use, because we have been responsible for the care-taking of children and the family I think we’ve developed certain skills around relationships, around being responsible for relationships, around being more interested in for example when your kids are screaming and fighting with each other you eventually learn that it isn’t really going to get your very far to sit them down and figure out what happened. Who did what, who started it, whose fault it is, eventually you learn that what’s important in mending it and moving it forward. Well it’s just not Legal Services and it’s not just state support, our whole system of laws because they were developed primarily by males who didn’t have those
responsibilities tends to focus on the past, tends to focus on individuals who did what, who’s wrong, who’s responsible and then how do you make that one person whole, the one that was harmed. Whereas I think women have a tendency to be more concerned with whatever happened, I don’t care who started it, healing the relationship so that and not seeing it as two separate persons but seeing that relationship and that relationship has to heal and those two people have to move on or people in that whole family have to move on. So the whole way of looking at problems even is different. And again I don’t mean that inherently. I think that men who now take a more active role in raising their children and caring about their community and things like that develop some of the same skills but I think it’s fairly safe to say that women are encouraged and rewarded for developing these skills and men are not. And so we develop the skills. And now we’re coming into the law in massive numbers with I think some very different skills. And I think that was just beginning to happen back in the 70s when women were just coming out of law school and just beginning to really come into Legal Services. And that we will see more and more cooperative task force what some people call the soft skills where instead of going head to head in litigation we will work out 500-page consent decrees and I’m not saying one is right and one is wrong. I mean there are certainly times historical times and also times in each communities [END OF SIDE ONE OF TAPE] . . . development when hard nosed litigation is important and when you know getting to yes is important. But I do see at that time in the 1970s when this new wave or second wave of state support developed I see a lot of these things interplaying. And that’s why I say I think the fact that we were women, the fact that we were in states that already had
developed programs, the fact that the times needed this cooperation and coordination just all kind of fit together very nicely and worked.

**BP**: That certainly fits in historically as I’ve seen it. It struck me that state support did not have any power relationship with its constituencies anyway, that even the first generation of state support units couldn’t tell anybody what to do. And to the extent that they were going to work with the rest of the Legal Services community and Legal Services programs they were going to have to do so they were sometimes accused of case stealing but basically to get much more accomplished besides taking over and doing it all by yourself you really had to work with other people and I think it makes sense to have brought in people that have that way of working in the state support. I’ve often thought that we ought to have that kind of selection criteria. You see that happening in other places in state support, you were involved sort of nationally with state support, is that a characteristic that went beyond the southeast early days.

**LG**: Well I certainly think I mean I don’t know of any what I call the first wave the traditional centers, the poverty law center model I guess. I don’t know that any of the state supports that have developed since then have been based on that model. For whatever reason and frankly lack of resources is a big one. I think in some states it in fact would make sense to have more of a poverty law center program. In other states it doesn’t. I don’t mean to say that the way we did it in Tennessee is really the way it should have been done. It’s really what worked in Tennessee. I think in other states where you don’t have the same longevity and history of local programs and of people and experts in those local programs it might make a lot of sense to have a much stronger state support office almost kind of like having something in between a statewide program and
then a bunch of field offices, you know having something halfway in between. But that isn’t what happened. In fact most of the state support centers as far as I know all the state support centers that developed after those first traditional ones in some way or another played much more of the responding to the field coordination collaboration coalition work.

**BP:** When did state support people get together in a bigger organization? You’ve talked about conferences and meetings. There seemed to be a national organization.

**LG:** I was trying to remember you know the year and it’s funny how memories stick in your mind. I can’t remember the year but I’m almost positive that it was when NLADA had its annual meeting in San Francisco, which would have been ‘81 or ‘82, I can’t remember which and the only reason I remember that is because it’s like the picture of this room stick in my mind. So I think that the big push came at that conference I can’t remember who, I know that Victor had been very, very interested in state support, had been very I think pleasantly I don’t want to say surprised although I think there was a little bit of surprise in there, I think that he liked what he saw when he looked at the southeast and was glad to see some of these systems and structures being put into place. Somehow a meeting got set up for all of the state support people and I can’t really remember exactly how that happened but we all met in San Francisco and I believe Alan Houseman was also involved in that. We talked about the kind of work that we do, we talked about what issues, it was kind of like a task force meeting that we would run in Tennessee, you know getting everybody together, looking at what’s happening, looking at what problems people have and then seeing whether any of the solutions involved us working together. And as we brain stormed that through I think the meeting was like a
three-hour meeting, I had pretty much come with an agenda that I wanted a national organization. There was OLSBUC, this was right during the Reagan cuts, nobody was speaking on behalf of state support. I felt like the new wave of state support was still very tenuous.

**BP**: OLSBUC is the Organization of Legal Services Back up Centers.

**LG**: Back up centers, the national back up centers. And I was very concerned that our resources would be cut right when we had just identified and pretty much made a case for bringing the second wave of state support up in funding and in fact at some place along in these years right in that same time period we had pretty much worked out a formula and my recollection was that it wasn’t my four percent I think it was six percent or maybe it was the four percent and that there was a national goal that over a four-five year period nationally the state support programs would be gradually brought up to that funding goal. So I do remember that I wanted a national organization and I don’t remember and I know I was not the only person and I don’t remember whether I raised it or not initially. I won’t take credit for that but it became clear that we started talking about a national organization and again for anyone who doesn’t know Victor you never talk about something where you don’t get to a point where Victor says well who is going to do what, when and you know take down their names, etc. He kept saying who is going to do what and what do we have to do to make this happen. And Alan, the head of the western center,

**BP**: Alan Raider

**LG**: Alan Raider was there and you know he was like I just stood in awe of Alan Raider and Alan Rogers on the east coast but Alan Rogers wasn’t at the meeting, Alan
Raider was, I do remember that. In fact Alan Raider was really one of the few traditional directors that was there. This was mostly this new crew of folks. I just assumed that Alan would take responsibility for that but for whatever reason very clearly did not want to take any responsibility. I know what it felt like, I cannot in any way ascribe these motives but it felt in that very early stages that they thought we were foolish, they being the traditional directors, including even Alan Houseman, you know here were a bunch of whippersnappers who did a much lower level of advocacy and were much less lawyers and it felt and again I cannot ascribe any of this to anybody, I can only tell you from all the things that had ever happened to me in my life it felt like we were pretty much being dismissed by the powers that be in state support. And that was okay for me because if all of the second wave centers could get together and task force we could get down what we needed to get done without them. It didn’t really bother me that much but I do remember that feeling. So it ended up where nobody really was willing to take responsibility and I said I would do it. I would take responsibility for seeing if we could find some funding you know trying to set up some kind of national meeting and get the thing started. And so there were several other people who were willing to participate. I remember of course Victor jumped right in and was willing to be there to bounce off ideas. He helped me set up a meeting in Washington, D.C. We pulled together kind of like an advisory committee that included a lot of very interesting characters. We had our first meeting which to me seemed very unfocused with a lot of ideas being thrown out on the table that absolutely terrified me. It had really been the first meeting like that that I had facilitated and I can remember later Victor coming up to me and saying I could tell you thought so and so’s idea was off the wall, why did you let people discuss it for so long. I said well I
didn’t know how to cut off the discussion. And he said well you just ask if there is a second. Somebody had put forward a motion that was totally off the wall and I had being the task force facilitator that I am opened it up for discussion and let everybody discuss it without sensing the pulse of the group and realizing that everyone, not just me thought this was the stupidest idea they had ever heard of. So he gave me a lot of little points on how to move things along and not get bogged down on the peripheral. And we found some money, we got a grant, small grant put together an advisory committee and officers and really I look back on it and I’m somewhat amazed at what we able to accomplish in those first few years, especially since this was like ‘81, ‘82, ‘83 when there were a lot of political things happening.

**BP:** A lot of attacks on Legal Services.

**LG:** A lot of attacks on support and of course we got a lot of the spillover from national support at the time when we had a responsibility to really move effectively in legislative and administrative advocacy because of the whole shift with the budget reconciliation. So I again just fortuitously got thrown into this situation where I think something got pulled together that was exactly right at the exactly the right time. I believe we played a major role in keeping state support from being defunded or even cut back. There was a point in time when it was clear that Clint and Bucky and the folks in Washington had cut a deal with the Legal Services Board and I’m sure it was the best deal that they could cut where pretty much state support was going to take a 10 percent hit across the board and we were able to because we were organized and because we had gathered a tremendous amount of information we had surveys, gathered a lot of data about what was being done across the country in state support. We sat down with
members of the Harvey Olson board and I especially remember a meeting in Washington, D.C. when Dick Skut and I sat down with Howard Dana and talked about state support and Howard was really familiar with the traditional support centers, you know, the Michigans and the Mass law reforms and I told him about Tennessee and I told him about what we did. And that day about three hours later in the middle of the board meeting he called Dick and I over and he had written a resolution or a motion and wanted to know if we would agree to it and it basically ended up holding state support harmless and the rationale that we had helped give to him was the fact that a number of these programs were funded through local offices and to cut them would raise the issue of hearings because programs could protest if their funding had been cut more than a certain amount. And with that little and we had also just explained how there were 20 different kinds of state support structures politically and that it would be very messy to try to cut or defund state support, that they would have to go through probably you know numerous suits because there was no clean way to do it. And I think that long with some history of how state support was being done differently I think really turned him around and that meeting they the board voted not to cut state support. And obviously there were numerous things. There was the big meeting in Mississippi where Michael Raft the state support director there put together probably the first and best field response to the Harvey Olson Board where they just orchestrated it wonderfully and had deep ties with the community and brought in clients and community people and legislators that they worked with to talk about what it really meant and why you had to go to the legislature for some issues to solve clients problems. And it was one of the I think most dramatic displays of the quality
of work in this community was that Mississippi meeting with the Harvey Olson Board. I was proud to sit there and listen to what was going on.

**BP:** State support I think had a critical role in my recollections in both the survival efforts and the protection of funding, protection of certain kinds of advocacy . . . you’re right to look at your watch because we’re about out of time and the role of state support more broadly and of the national organization of state support units NOSSU is good for a whole other conversation. Any closing thought you want to leave us with?

**LG:** Yeah, I will. You know again maybe this is a sign of my age. But I do think that one of the things in Legal Services and I’m not going to look at the past now, I’m going to take the gender skills that I’ve developed and try to look at what has to push us into the future. In looking at the past, one of the things that has troubled me is as I guess we all do when we get close to 50, to begin to look at whether what we’ve done has really made a difference and I think one of the things that I have a growing concern about is if our mission and if our goal is to simply provide our clients with access, if the system to which we are providing them access is an oppressive corrupt system then we’re not giving our clients very much. And I am looking more and more not just at the economic system in this country which is obviously not a very fair and equitable one but also the legal system and how that legal system has really developed within the context of that economic system and as such really responds to that economic system. So that if that economic system is based upon the oppression of one people by another for profit then getting our clients in there and even making them full participants in that system isn’t getting them anything. So what is it that we need to be doing. How is it that we can begin changing the very institution as opposed to just getting our clients what they deserve out
of it. How do we not just as Legal Services but as a country begin figuring out how to change that institution. And I think a little piece of it is I’m at first I was very scared and very critical of all this new wave stuff of mediation and stuff that is going on. It felt like it was just another way for everybody else to get what they wanted and leave poor people out of it. But I’m starting now to look at mediation and conciliation which I think is a step beyond mediation as having the potential of being a dramatically different than the way we process conflicts now. And to me it is a step closer to restoring relationships. Restoring relationships so that human beings can move into the future together as opposed to just defining who did what to whom, when and who’s wrong and who’s to blame, which may give you monetary damages but increases the chance that those two human beings will be split apart forever. We are becoming more polarized than I have ever known us to be and somehow that’s got to turn around. So those are my final comments.

BP: Well . . . a whole conversation here. Thanks an awful lot.

LG: Thanks Brian.