

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP

LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN GOVERNORS

Chapter 10

Governor Olene Walker

I learned a great lesson from being a PTA president one year. If you want things done, you don't tell people it won't take much time. Instead you say, "This is so important that it will take time!" You have to get people to buy in before they will be willing to put forth the time and energy to make a difference.

~ Governor Olene Walker

I interviewed Governor Olene Walker at her home in Salt Lake City, Utah on May 10, 2005. She was sworn in as Utah's fifteenth governor on November 5, 2003, and she served as Utah's first woman governor until early 2005. Walker spearheaded many important initiatives including education programs, healthcare reform, workforce development, and tax reform. Her peers recognized her leadership ability and elected her to chair the National Conference of Lieutenant Governors. Olene was also elected as the president of the National Association of Secretaries of State, the only lieutenant governor ever to be elected to that position. Prior to becoming governor, Olene Walker was a leader in the Utah House of Representatives where she served as majority whip and assistant majority whip. Using her strong academic background, she led Utah toward improvements in education and literacy throughout her decades of public service in a variety of roles. This chapter will share Governor Walker's insights, stories, and experiences, helping us understand her lifelong leadership development journey.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Olene Smith was born on November 15, 1930, in Ogden, Utah and was raised on a family farm west of the city. During that time, she lived in the same house her father lived in from his birth to his death. Olene was reared in a stable, modest middle-income home and felt secure and loved. Coming from a rural, hard-working background, Olene was instilled with a strong work ethic and a desire to help those in her community. As the second of five children, she was also taught the importance of family and the need to work together to accomplish the task at hand. She has three brothers (not quite two years older, twenty months

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younger, and six years younger than she) and one sister (fifteen years her junior).

During Olene's upbringing, she doesn't remember her parents differentiating between the "boys and the girls regarding education and general work expectations." Although the boys typically milked the cows, Olene said she could "milk a cow just fine." All of the children learned to work hard by fulfilling a variety of tasks and responsibilities. She said,

I don't know whether my father was an educator so he could farm or if he farmed so he could be an educator! We lived on a farm with dairy and beef cattle, and we also grew crops like tomatoes, potatoes, sugar beets, alfalfa, grain, and corn. We really learned to work hard. I remember spending days thinning and topping beets, planting tomatoes, and digging up potatoes. My dad use to call the farm his "golf game" and we all learned to play.

Olene doesn't remember any discussion about whether or not she and her siblings would go to college. She said,

*It was just assumed that we would attend college. Both of my parents had gone on to college and to receive higher degrees, so we all just planned to go to college when we finished high school. The question was not **if** we were going, but **where** we were going.*

Education was clearly an important value in the Smith household.

Father

Olene's father, Thomas O. Smith, graduated from college with his bachelor's and master's degrees during the depression, and the only available job at that time was to "round up and teach the kids who were sloughing school." He did well and quickly moved into administration. He spent many years as a principal of an elementary school, junior high, and a high school. He was then appointed to be the superintendent of Ogden City Schools and remained in that position for nearly twenty-five years until his retirement. Olene and her siblings attended Weber High School, the archrival of Ogden High School, so there were many debates on who would win football and basketball games at the dinner table.

After Olene's father became an administrator, he eventually received his Ph.D. from the University of Southern California by going to school during the summers. She remembers piling into the family car each summer to make the long journey to California so that he could finish his degree. Olene said, "I've often wondered what motivated him to get a Ph.D. It was definitely not typical, even of educators for that time, but he felt obtaining the highest levels of education to be an extremely important goal." Both of her father's parents had only eighth-grade educations because that was what was required at that time. They had a very small farm, which was their meager livelihood.

Thomas was also very involved in church and community work. He served for twenty-five years in a non-paid leadership position in his church. He was

involved continuously in community work, and Olene remembers him serving on community boards that were instrumental in building a new hospital in town and also bringing the symphony to Ogden. When she was young, Olene remembers her family attending the symphony whenever it played in Ogden.

Mother

Olene's mother, Nina Hadley Smith, started teaching elementary school after she earned her associate degree at the early age of eighteen. She ceased her teaching career when she got married, but later returned to the classroom when Weber School District became "desperate for teachers during World War II." She then continued her schooling and obtained a bachelor's degree in education from Utah State University. Olene knew that her mother was a wonderful teacher because years later "people remembered her for her caring nature and willingness to give special attention to those who needed it." They said she would stay in during recess and after school to help struggling students. Although it was unusual for the time, Nina taught school most of the time Olene was growing up. However, Olene remembers her mother taking "some years off," particularly after her younger sister was born.

Although both of Nina's parents only had eighth-grade educations, she and her three sisters all pursued careers in education, teaching school. Olene finds this situation "amazing and ironic" as her mother's parents were farmers and had limited resources for most of their lives. Yet, somehow Olene's grandparents stressed the importance of a college education to their children, and education became one of Nina's core values. Nina also learned to work hard growing up on a family farm, and she continued that tradition after she married. In addition to the farm work, her mother planted an acre-and-a-half garden for family, neighbors, and friends. As a child, Olene spent countless hours working in her mother's garden. It was a way of life and Olene felt that it was important to teach her own children the necessity of hard work. She would bring them from Salt Lake to her mother's farm to "give them the opportunity to experience farm life." Many important lessons were taught while weeding, pruning, and harvesting that garden. Nina also left an important legacy for her children and grandchildren. Olene said, "Even when she passed away at seventy-nine, my mother still had an acre garden that she meticulously planted each summer. She loved working hard and sharing the bounty of her garden with family and friends."

Olene's mother was also very involved in their church and had various service positions throughout the decades, including being the president of the women's organization for many years. Nina was also Olene's 4H leader and, later in life, a school volunteer. Olene also described her mother's efforts in other community work:

We were probably better off than most families because we were a two-income family and had a large farm. My mother, being very industrious and frugal, sewed the clothes for my family. When she had extra fabric, she made clothes

for others in need. I kept saying, "Why do you sew for other people?" She would say, "Well, it would be nice for this family to have something extra."

Extended Family

Both of Olene's grandparents lived close to her in Utah. She remembers going to one grandparent's home on Christmas Eve and the other on Christmas day for many years. She said, "I was very close to my grandparents, and they were certainly an influence in my life." She spent time with relatives on holidays and other special occasions. Her father had lots of aunts who were her mother's age, and "they'd get together on everybody's birthdays." Olene feels that she had a "very close extended family" that provided stability, support, and encouragement for her to develop throughout the years. One important value she acquired from her family and extended family was that everyone has an obligation to contribute to society. She has kept this with her throughout her life.

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Personality and Schooling

Olene said that she was quite outgoing as a child. She remembers having lots of friends her age as she was growing up, more girls than boys. She also enjoyed being involved in many different activities. She believes she was fairly courageous as a child, which she illustrated in the following story:

I remember one time, when I was about eight or nine years old, I was supposed to give a 2 ½ minute talk in church. I remembered arriving at the chapel and someone asking about my talk, and I realized that I had totally forgotten about it. I rushed to my mother, told her the situation, and asked her to tell the people in charge that I wasn't prepared and couldn't give it. She asked me whose responsibility it was that I took this assignment, and I answered that it was mine. Then she told me she would help, but that I must give the talk. I remember sitting down with my mother for a few minutes and coming up with some ideas. She said, "I think if you could find a song you could talk about, then you could use the words as part of your speech." I remembered I liked a song about prayer and took the words up with me to speak. I got up, read some of the words, and then talked about the importance of prayer. I did pretty well and felt good about it. When I look back on that experience, I think that I must have been brave. I also learned from my mother that I needed to take responsibility for my own assignments.

Olene remembers people telling her that she had given a great talk and how they appreciated that she hadn't read the whole talk like others did. This gave her some confidence in her speaking ability as a child and may have led to her interest and involvement in debate and extemporaneous speaking later in her youth.

Olene shared a few more insights into her childhood. First, she told the following humorous story about her limited vision as a child:

I remember having a sleepover when I was ten or eleven one time in our big front yard. We decided to see who could come up with the best idea of something that could actually happen in our lifetime. One girl came up with the idea that a man would walk on the moon. The rest of us wouldn't let her count it, because we knew it could never happen. To this day, she still accuses me of being the one that wouldn't let her count it.

When men actually walked on the moon, Olene was reminded that even unimaginable events can occur and that having lofty goals and dreaming about the future can be helpful. The second insight she shared was that she was always a little afraid of heights. Her friends used to ride up to the top of the haystack holding on the forks of the derrick, and she remembers doing it a few times and hating it. She recalls being aware of this weakness and wishing she wasn't afraid. She began acknowledging her strengths and weaknesses during these years, which is an important characteristic of successful leaders. Finally, she remembers her strong desire to attend school as a young girl and some struggles she had that also demonstrate her childhood personality:

When I was five, we didn't have a kindergarten; however, I was able to go to school in a first grade class for about three days with a cousin. Somehow I could read pretty well so the first-grade teacher told my mother that she could put me in second grade. Of course, my mother wisely said, "No." I later stayed with an aunt that year and was able to go to full-day summer kindergarten, which was great. However, after lunch every day, the teachers wanted us to go to sleep on a mat. I had trouble holding still and never went to sleep. They picked the children to go do crafts by how fast they went to sleep, and I was always last. It probably warped my whole psyche!

Olene described herself as a good student, but quickly mentioned that she was one of many good students in her schools. She said she definitely didn't stand out in art and music (singing). Yet, she remembers that she must have been viewed by adults as somewhat influential to her peers. For example, in sixth grade the school administration called four or five girls into the office and asked them to help some of the others who were being left out and struggling. She remembers doing a "fairly good job for a while." She recalls having a cognitive awareness of the fact that she should be inclusive during this year, and that commitment to inclusiveness stayed with her throughout her career.

During high school, Olene said she was academically strong but said there were several students who "competed for top honors." She was sufficiently competitive that getting good grades was important to her. Olene felt she was in one of the outstanding groups in her school. This was a group of about fifteen girls with a lot of different personalities. Olene and three others were more of the "tight group," but she always felt a burden to try to make sure people didn't feel left out. Regarding dating she said, "Although I was asked out more than anyone should be, there was always some very popular boy who wouldn't even look my way." Looking back she wishes boys hadn't been that important and that she would have just focused more on studies.

Activities and Employment

Olene enjoyed keeping busy and active as a child. She remembers spending a lot of time working on the farm and in the home. When she and her siblings had time to play, she recalls “riding horses and bikes a lot.” Olene and her friends also used to make up stories and act them out among the farm equipment on the property. She also recalls a lot of evenings playing “kick the can, hide and seek and Red Rover, Red Rover” with both siblings and friends. She remembers swimming in the canal that ran close by her home, even though today it would have been considered unsafe. She recalled having numerous sleepovers with friends, especially during the summertime. Olene also spoke of being very involved in her church throughout her upbringing. She and her family went to weekly meetings, attended banquets and other activities, and participated in service projects. She also liked playing sports with her brothers and provided the following delightful description:

I used to play football with my brothers. I wasn't especially well coordinated, but I was pretty tough. I remember one time my mother saying, “Olene, I don't care if you want to play football with the boys, but you can't force your friends to play because they always get hurt and come in crying.” I grew up with brothers who were kind of rough and tumble, and I loved playing football with them. Two of my brothers ended up playing football in high school and one played at the University of Utah.

Olene also spoke of the importance of reading in her life. She said her family frequented the library when she was a child and youth. It was common for her family to meet at the library after shopping on Saturdays, where they would get new books for the week.

As Olene became a teenager, she was interested and involved in leadership. She was elected as student body president of her small junior high, but her parents felt that the ninth-grade teacher did not provide the educational opportunities that existed in the school where her father was principal, so she changed schools. However, in high school, she had plenty of leadership positions. Olene admitted that she and several other friends were chosen probably more than their fair share for these responsibilities because they had good organizational and management skills. She was president or had a leadership role in several clubs. She served as a youth group president in her church and had various responsibilities in that role. She said that she never looked at these responsibilities as “more than routine and what was expected.” She and other close friends were often in charge of assemblies and other high school events. She recalls being elected as an officer in Pep Club. Now, as she looked back on that experience, she said, “Why in the world did we waste our time decorating football and basketball player lockers and doing other Pep Club activities? It seems like we should have been doing more substantial work.”

During her youth, she also became involved in 4H and orchestra. She excelled in 4H and in fact won a state award for sewing a suit with a blouse, skirt,

and jacket. Because she won the state competition, she had the opportunity to travel to Chicago for the national event her senior year. She said,

The conference organizers asked me to be on a panel at the national event. After I presented at the panel, the head of Kraft Foods asked me to chair a large forum two days later that would have 4H leaders, business people, and others participating and attending. Although I panicked a little because of the magnitude of the assignment, I conducted the session, and it was a great experience. I felt very good about it. I think about what an incredible experience that was for a seventeen year old.

Olene played the violin for the orchestra for many years and enjoyed developing her musical abilities, but felt that her “true talents lay elsewhere.” She said, “I don’t know why my parents wasted money for so long on lessons.” She was always the second violinist, not the first. However, from this experience she learned the importance of contributing to a group or team even when she wasn’t the best or the leader.

Olene also loved physical activity and played lots of informal sports. She was “capable and adequate” but reminded me that she was never the superstar. She was always one of the first five or six chosen and remembers playing lots of dodge ball, baseball, and other “gym games” but not basketball or football, as “girls couldn’t play organized basketball or football during those years.” She mentioned that their junior and senior high schools didn’t have formal sports programs for girls. In high school, she was president of the ski club and was a reasonably good skier. She believes that participation in sports helped her develop skills like teamwork, toughness, dealing well with conflict and loss, and “working together with people who are different from you for the common good.”

Olene absolutely loved debate and believes it was good for her development in many ways. She did extemporaneous speaking and said that this was “probably the best developmental activity” she had to prepare her for service in the legislature. She learned to think clearly and quickly on her feet. Speech and debate gave her practice in presenting in front of people, using logical information, and putting together rational arguments. She always had the same debate partner, and they learned to work as a team. She believes this experience was “critical” in helping her prepare for future leadership roles. Debate, speech, and other similar opportunities helped her continue to build self-confidence during these critical years. Olene said, “I probably felt as much at ease in communicating and speaking as anyone I knew.” The school “always touted us as the top debate team.” Years later, Olene’s debate partner told her that she felt it was unfair that Olene spent less time preparing for their debates and always seemed to receive the higher marks from the judges.

Last but not least, Olene admitted that one of her favorite activities during high school was dating young men. During her adolescent years, she remembers being a little “boy crazy like teenage girls become.” She explained that in her dating days kids just didn’t “hang out” like they do today. When she was in high

school, she could occasionally work in two dates on certain Saturdays. She said, “I was the queen of getting those dates in.” Looking back, she said she wasted “way too much time” in that area.

Olene’s main job during high school was still unpaid work on her family farm and in her home. However, after she graduated from high school, she worked at a little restaurant during the summer. She said,

My folks tried to talk me out of working at the restaurant as there was a lot of work to do on the farm and the family had only one car. The restaurant was probably 4 ½ miles from home, but I was determined to work there. Often I walked there and walked home. It took me about an hour and twenty minutes to walk to work if I went fast. Sometimes I caught a bus part way but that still took more than an hour.

She believed this work experience was good for her in a number of ways. It gave her the opportunity to manage money and the experience of working for someone other than her own family.

Influential Individuals

Olene had a “collective appreciation” for many individuals during her youth but remembers a few teachers and a coach that were particularly influential. First, she spoke of a fourth-grade teacher whom all of the children loved. This teacher, Charlotte McGrath, had a “tiny little store down in west Weber,” and during the summer, Olene and her friends would ride horses and bicycles down to this store to see her. She remembers this teacher having a positive, happy disposition; they always felt accepted by her. When Olene and her peers moved on to fifth grade, the students were disappointed to be assigned a teacher who was going to retire and would actually fall asleep during class. She remembers that when the students returned from Thanksgiving, their former fourth-grade teacher had been reassigned to their class. The students were thrilled and enjoyed the rest of the year. This teacher was passionate about what she taught and also had a way of helping the students find joy in learning and education.

Christian Graves, Olene’s high school debate coach, was also influential in her life during these years. This coach “really urged and encouraged” Olene in speech and debate. Olene believes that she was able to excel because of the influence of the coach. Although she remembers several other teachers being influential, she only mentioned one other by name. Harold Brown was influential because he “was a great teacher and treated me with a great deal of respect.” All of these people gave Olene general encouragement and support. She felt because they all knew her parents as outstanding community leaders that they expected and anticipated that she too would excel.

Life Expectations

As a child, Olene doesn’t remember contemplating whether she had various options in her life. She remembers at one time thinking she would love to be a great symphony orchestra director, but she quickly realized she didn’t have the

musical expertise to do that. She also recalls wanting to be a librarian because she loved to read. Although her mother and other women she knew taught school, she didn't have women role models in leadership positions. As a young girl, she doesn't remember even considering most professional occupational options because of the lack of these role models or mentors. Yet, as she entered college, she knew that she did not want to be a secretary, a nurse, or even a teacher in the public schools, the job opportunities that most girls considered in the early fifties.

UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE YEARS

Olene received a scholarship in debate from Weber College, now Weber State University, so she started her college career in her own hometown. During her freshman year, she became involved in debate and extemporaneous speaking. At Weber College, she lived at home but was in a sorority. Social pursuits continued to play an important role in Olene's life. She said, "I think I was the only one that got rushed by every sorority at the college. Although it seems so insignificant now, it was important to me at the time." She also worked part time in the Athletic Office, which was a busy and exciting place to be for a freshman student.

Olene visited Brigham Young University (BYU) campus for a week during the summer after her freshman year of college to visit her brother who was going to school there. She said,

I quickly discovered there were more boys than girls attending BYU, so I immediately decided I should transfer there for my sophomore year. I hate to admit that now, but it's true. Of course when I got down there in the fall, all the girls returned.

When Olene transferred to BYU that fall, she moved into an apartment with two close friends. While attending BYU, she took eighteen to twenty credits every semester and didn't have paid employment. She majored in political science and minored in history. She also decided to earn a secondary-education teaching certificate because her father kept saying, "Now, what is it you are going to do with a political science degree?" She believes political science and education were helpful fields for leadership development with their focus on applicable topics and skills related in part to political leadership.

During these years, Olene was inspired by two excellent BYU professors, Gaylen Caldwell and John Bernhard, who helped shape her thinking about politics. Because their classes were interesting, politics and government became very exciting to her. She actually decided to major in political science because of the influence of these men. She remembers having some very tough classes with only a few females in each, but she appreciated the academic challenge the courses provided. She also had an influential history professor, Richard Paul,

who went on to become a university president. She ultimately decided to minor in history after taking his course. She said, "If I had to pick academic mentors in my whole progression, it would be those four." She not only enjoyed attending their classes, but the classes themselves provided the encouragement she needed to eventually begin graduate school.

Olene clearly continued to have a strong desire to achieve and accomplish her goals. At BYU she quickly became involved in several clubs and organizations. As a sophomore, she was elected to the legislative body of the school. She was also selected first attendant to the homecoming queen her junior year. As a senior, she was elected as the BYU student body vice president. In fact, she was first vice president in charge of all the student assemblies on campus. In this position, she used to attend campus and faculty leadership meetings to represent the students. She remembers one particular experience:

I remember attending one particular leadership meeting when the president of the university was attending. He just lit into the football coach about how terrible the football team was that year. The football coach said, "You know, I can't recruit good players because other schools are offering scholarships to football players and we are not." The president said that is was against the rules to offer football scholarship, so that couldn't have been the case. The room was quiet for a minute, and then I courageously raised my hand and said, "President, I have a brother who just got a great football scholarship at the University of Utah." After the meeting, about thirty faculty members came up to me and thanked me for saying that. I must have had some confidence to defend the football coach like that.

Although she didn't realize she was doing so at the time, Olene believes she was practicing many leadership skills in these roles. Olene did not join the debate team at BYU, but continued debating occasionally "whenever they needed somebody." Therefore, she ended up attending a lot of debate meets and kept involved. When she graduated with her bachelor's degree (cum Laude) from BYU she received the outstanding graduate award which was based on leadership, academics, and service.

During her college years, Olene learned to prioritize her activities. For example, Olene was involved with a ROTC-sponsored drill team for women that met at the same time as a committee over student assemblies, which she chaired. She explained,

I missed a lot of ROTC drills because of student government commitments. Also, I had trouble with left and right (I could handle east, west, north, and south very well). They finally told me that I could remain one of the top officers but that I didn't have to come to drill practice any more. I thought, "Great!" By that time, I was beginning to question all of the female appendages created for the adoration of the males. I thought, "Why are we doing all of this marching when the boys are training for something real. We're just wasting our time marching up and down the field."

This humorous story provides a good example of how Olene was able to keep things in perspective and move quickly on when she discovered her personal weaknesses and inabilities. She set priorities to allow herself to do everything she wanted to do. She came to rational realizations and then moved forward.

During her college years, Olene became aware of important social issues. She saw the need for women to become involved, and as a result of this, she organized additional social units on campus to encourage more young women to participate. She was asked to reach out and encourage the creation of new leadership groups on campus. All of these activities helped her continue to learn to work with different kinds of people. She doesn't remember leading any crusades, but learned to work within the system fairly well. Overall, Olene said that her college experience was "remarkable." She enjoyed every element of her courses and extracurricular involvement. However, she still says that, "In retrospect, I would have focused more on studies and less on social elements."

GRADUATE SCHOOL AND MARRIAGE

During Olene's junior year of college, she met Myron Walker. The first time she saw him he was directing the parade lineup for homecoming and she was on a float. Her first impression was "what a good-looking guy." He was a student body officer at BYU, and shortly afterwards she formally met him in the student council. They dated, but after Myron graduated, he went into the army, and Olene was busy with academics and student activities her senior year.

When Olene graduated in 1953, she realized that her educational pursuits were not over. She absolutely loved learning and wanted to continue her formal education. Olene had debated back and forth whether she should go into law or get a master's degree in political science. She had been heavily involved in student government and enjoyed leadership roles. She said,

I wasn't very conscious of the fact that I enjoyed leadership, but I guess a pattern was beginning to emerge that I could and would be a leader. However, after graduation, I certainly made a conscious choice. If I had applied to law school, I would have gone to the University of Utah. Instead, I applied to the political theory program at Stanford. I made a conscious choice because I had decided I wanted to become a professor.

Olene was accepted at Stanford and entered a one-year master's degree program on a scholarship. She loved her program and had very good professors. She was "thrown in with a lot of people from all over the country." She said,

It probably broadened my horizons a great deal. I had to seriously study for the first time. I couldn't get by with cramming the night before as I had done so often throughout my college career. I got As and a couple of Bs at Stanford, so I wasn't at the top of the class; but I found that I could still compete and do well in this new environment. It gave me a certain degree of confidence.

She remembers two particular professors at Stanford asking her to correct papers for undergraduate classes. This also gave her a degree of confidence that the professors liked her work and acknowledged her intellectual value. Although she did have a scholarship, she worked as a resident assistant in one of the houses on campus. She met with the dean of women on a regular basis to discuss issues and policies.

Olene's earlier involvement in leadership during her undergraduate college years was motivated by her desire to "get things done." Although at Stanford she wasn't involved in student government, she continued to become aware that women needed to and should emerge as leaders. She was beginning to see the "bigger picture regarding what women could do." In her political theory education at Stanford, she began thinking about the role of women in becoming critical policy makers. She said, "Somewhere along the road, my experience was beginning to nudge me in that direction."

Myron was at Fort Ord, which was relatively close in proximity to Stanford. Olene always knew she would get married and have children, but she wanted to do certain things first. They continued to see each other during her year at Stanford, but then she decided that maybe she wanted to do a Rotary fellowship to Italy for two years. Myron finally grew impatient and gave her an ultimatum. Olene explained,

Myron finally said, "This is it. If you go to Italy, our relationship will never work out." He called my bluff, and we ended up getting married between winter and spring quarters while I was a student at Stanford. It was the best decision I ever made.

After they married, Olene drove from Pacific Grove to Stanford during spring semester, ninety miles each way, which was no small task. Myron was going to attend the business school at Harvard for his M.B.A. the next fall, so they moved to Boston and began living as "very poor married students."

EARLY PARENTHOOD AND RELOCATIONS

In Cambridge, Olene obtained employment at Polaroid Corporation and was in charge of new accounts. She felt it was good for her to work in a for-profit company, so she could have some business experience in a professional setting. She said, "In those days, women didn't work while they were pregnant, but I did." She worked until just before her first child was born, "a little less than one year after she was married." She then chose to become a stay-at-home mother.

Myron had a scholarship that paid for tuition, but they struggled to make ends meet with living expenses. They couldn't afford student housing, so they found rent-free living situations where they could manage and care for apartments and a home. They enjoyed Boston and had a wonderful group of friends who were also in school. She said, "We were all poor, but we all played Monop-

oly. On Friday nights, we had parties after our husbands handed their papers in at midnight.” Olene remembers that she and Myron had the most inexpensive season symphony tickets and occasionally went to plays and musicals before they hit New York. She recalls “having a remarkable time there because of the academic environment and great friends.” Myron finished his M.B.A. at Harvard after two years, just before their second child was born.

For the next thirteen years, Olene was a full-time stay-at-home mother and had little time for community involvement outside her basic church attendance and service. She and Myron had all seven of their children and moved thirteen times within a twelve-year period. Most of the moves were across the country or to a different state. Olene explained that living in a variety of states and cities helped widen her perspectives on community issues and needs. Her social circles were often within her church group, and she recalls having “a lot of great friends” in various places during those years. She said, “It also made us more self-reliant, because we couldn’t run home to anyone if we had an argument.” She also believes these moves and continual transitions helped her become more independent and learn to adjust to change. Finally, Myron decided that if he was going to work sixty hours a week, he might as well start a business of his own and move to Utah near extended family. So, after thirteen years of moving around a great deal, they moved back to Utah and have lived there for over forty years.

SERVICE AND VOLUNTEERISM

Olene’s professional career actually began as a school, church, and community volunteer. Because her decisions regarding her participation in specific efforts were dependent on her family, this section will include elements of both her family life and community involvement so the reader can more clearly understand her career pathway. This will also provide a more comprehensive picture of how she learned and practiced leadership.

PTA

After Olene and Myron moved their family to Utah in 1969, she quickly began getting involved in a lot of community activities including the PTA in her children’s schools. In fact, she eventually became the PTA president of every school her children attended. She believes that she acquired some very valuable leadership experiences in this role throughout these decades of service.

In addition to working with a wide-variety of people in organizing events and efforts, Olene also remembers some particular lessons in PTA work that were helpful later in her political positions. She said she actually learned more from the year she felt most ineffective as a leader than from the years she had many successes. She explained,

One of the greatest lessons I learned was from an experience when I felt that I was most ineffective as a leader. I was PTA president at a high school, and everybody was so busy. The school leaders said, "Oh, you just need to do the minimum." I talked other people into doing the same. We'd hold meetings over the phone and cut corners. As I look back on all my leadership roles, I've been chairman of so many things. I feel that was the year that I was probably most ineffective. It taught me a great lesson. You have to get people to buy in to whatever you are doing before they are willing to put the time and energy in it to make a difference.

She realized that her own expectations were pivotal to the PTA doing the minimum that was required that year. She learned that she didn't like leading with no major purpose in mind. She didn't get the unity and support because she had no "cause to lead." They did the regular required duties and people assumed she was successful, but she knew there was more that could have been done. She learned, "If you want things done, you don't say it won't take much time. Instead you say, 'This is so important it will take time!'" After this experience, Olene became PTA president at another school. She and other parents got passionately involved and ended up making a true difference in many ways. She remembers involving other people, delegating a lot of the work, and really having great success. She said,

We were able to accomplish so much. We brought volunteers into the school to help children. We implemented important programs in the school that had some of the richest and poorest in the state. We were committed to making a difference, and we found the time and energy to do so.

Church Service

Olene spoke about her leadership experiences in doing church service, particularly after she became established in the community. She was asked to serve in many roles that became helpful in her development in a variety of ways. For example, she was the president of the young women's organization in her church for over eight years. She explained,

By then, I was smart enough to say to the bishop, "I'll do it if you'll appoint Barbara Gibbs as my administrative assistant." I knew from my past experiences that I had to work with the right people to get the right things done. The bishop said, "But, Olene, that isn't a specific position or calling we have in our church." I told him that I thought we could be creative and make this new position, because I knew by then Barbara and I were a great team. She was so organized and detailed. And, I was kind of a big picture person wanting to get things done. This is the reason I was never asked to serve as a secretary in any organization.

Olene spoke about how well they did as a leadership team. She'd get great ideas for outings and adventures, and Barbara was the one who made sure they had rides and food. They each loved their own roles and complemented each other

well. In this and other church positions, she strengthened her skills in organization, communication, listening, and motivating others.

Other Volunteerism

In addition to her PTA and church service, Olene continued her involvement in other community service efforts throughout the years and remembers serving on many boards. She continued to do this even after starting her paid positions and throughout her Ph.D. program. She served as the chairperson of a committee to revitalize a section of downtown Salt Lake City. She served on various state and local task forces, as well as boards and committees for the United Way, Ballet West, Red Cross, Girls Village (a home for girls who were having problems with parents, school and law enforcement), the League of Women Voters, and the Utah Homeless Committee.

Olene served as the community council chairperson of a high school and a junior high and felt they made positive changes that “really benefited the children.” She believes that being involved in these change efforts helped her understand public education in more detail. These efforts led her to become involved in some political elements of the educational systems as well. She said, “I absolutely benefited from my K–12 volunteer work. When I look back on my experiences, I believe that I had many opportunities to write, speak, and expand and strengthen many skills important for leadership.”

DOCTORATE EDUCATION

Shortly after Olene and Myron moved to Utah with their children, Olene went to the University of Utah and talked to a professor who was “sort of the guru political science professor at that time.” He advised her not to pursue a formal degree, but just to take a few classes. Because she had been out of school for about thirteen years at that point (she was thirty-seven at this time), he told her that the GRE would just be too tough and that she should “just enjoy life.” She took an evening class in mid-eastern politics and absolutely loved it. However, shortly after this she began working part-time and didn’t take additional classes until she formally commenced working on her degree years later.

Olene started actually working on her doctorate degree in 1976. She found that she needed that intellectual stimulation, and her husband was “very cooperative” in helping with the children so she could do this. Although she remained interested in political science, she decided to get her Ph.D. in educational administration because she still felt that she wanted to either teach at the university level or become a superintendent of schools. Olene was working in the schools at this time and was “heavily connected with both disciplines.” So, she basically took classes whenever she could manage them, typically in the evenings. The University of Utah did require her to attend school full time for one year sometime during her doctoral program so she took fifteen to eighteen credit hours for two semesters so she could fulfill this requirement. During this

year, she also worked thirty hours a week and took care of her family and community obligations. She explained,

I merely set aside time from ten or eleven at night until three in the morning to study and eventually do my dissertation. I'm a night person. I do not require more than four or five hours of sleep. That's still about what I sleep at night. I wish I could get more. I really do. But that is when I have been able to accomplish what I have needed to get done in my life. During those quiet moments when everyone else was sleeping, I was able to study uninterrupted.

During these years, Olene remembers three influential individuals. A professor named David Sperry, dean of the department, was her first chair. She remembers him primarily for his strong encouragement and support and his dedication to improving the educational system. She also remembers Gene Jacobsen who took over as chairperson of her committee after the departure of David Sperry. He too took a special interest in her work and making certain that she completed her Ph.D. She took a challenging class from Professor Sterling McMurrin. He gave the students a reading assignment of forty books that they were to be tested on. Although she had seven children at the time, she still enjoyed a good challenge. There were fifty students in his class at the beginning of the semester and only a dozen at midterm. Olene recalls being the only student who showed up to take the final examination. She found great satisfaction in finishing and conquering those kinds of challenges.

It took Olene three years to complete her coursework for her Ph.D. and then two more to do her dissertation. She was fifty-one and a Utah state legislator when she finished her Ph.D. in education administration with an emphasis in law and policy. When she received her Ph.D., two of her children and a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law graduated the same day: one with a medical degree, one with a master's degree, and two with their bachelor's degrees.

CAREER/PAID POSITIONS

Olene had a paid professional position at Polaroid Corporation for six months after she graduated from Stanford. However, she did not have paid employment for nearly fourteen years as she gave birth to and raised children. As already noted, after giving birth to all seven children and moving to Utah, Olene immediately began her involvement in community work, which eventually led to paid employment offers.

Educational Consultant

In 1973, Olene was chairing a task force of an elementary curriculum analysis of the Salt Lake School District (just for fun), and she was working with a consultant who had been hired by the district to do the overall staff work. He quickly discovered Olene's capabilities and asked her to work full time with him as an

educational consultant. She turned him down because she had seven young children between the ages of three and fourteen and knew it would not work. He then proposed that she work only a few hours a day while her youngest was in preschool, and she decided to accept the position. So, she began working for an education-consulting firm analyzing the skills necessary to read and do math and developing materials.

After the completion of the contract with Salt Lake School District, the firm had a contract with the United States Department of Education evaluating Title III projects that were innovative and creative. She said, "I ended up being gone Tuesday through Thursday one week, to visit a project, and then I spent the next week analyzing and writing." Olene quickly discovered that the position took too much time away from her family even though she enjoyed the work. Her family needs always would be her first priority. This experience did strengthen her time management skills and she certainly learned more about the educational system. She met with the top people in education in the state and networked with various people that later became supporters. Olene also "certainly learned the process of education in terms of curriculum and curriculum development."

Federal Program Director

Olene then began working for the Salt Lake School District administrating a federal program and explained,

I negotiated time instead of salary in this position. In hindsight, I should have negotiated both, but I wanted to be able to go to my children's football games, basketball games, tennis matches, swim meetings, dance concerts, and all of that!

Olene ran the federal program for four years and worked with at-risk schools to develop programs that would help students stay in school. She learned more about the responsibility all community members have for all of the socioeconomic groups and ethnic populations in the state. She worked with educators, parents, and students, and acquired new insights into the issues of poverty and diversity. It broadened her perspectives and gave her the connections she still has to this day with ethnic communities within the state.

Director of Salt Lake Education Foundation

After working on the federal program for a few years, the superintendent of the school district asked Olene to form a foundation that would bring in additional money for the schools in that district. So in 1984, Olene became the full-time, paid director of Salt Lake Education Foundation. She had done some fundraising as a volunteer with other groups, but this was a challenging new experience. She quickly learned about fundraising saying:

First, I tried to raise money for education in general and found it was impossible. Then I decided to narrow it down to one specific school and that kind of worked, but I knew there must be a better way. I learned that we had to raise

money by talking about something concrete. I needed to raise money for a specific school to meet a specific need—for example, a new violin program for a specific central city school. I learned that I needed to know the costs of bows and sheet music. I discovered I could get people to donate money for books for a specific library but not books to help education in general. I discovered that people would contribute if they could see the specific needs and knew that their contribution would help individual students in a specific way. I learned that people need to see the result of their efforts.

Olene learned a lot about fundraising from this position. She also continued to develop a sense of “what works and what doesn’t.” She became very successful and later helped other school districts set up their own foundations. Again, she was also involved in boards and other community work during this time.

Legislator and Majority Whip

By 1980, several people had approached her, encouraging her to run for the legislature. With her political science background, she had always been interested in government. She continued to have a desire to “make a true difference to her community by trying to make things better.” Although she still had children at home, which meant that she was “driving carpools and going to a lot of sporting events,” and was writing her dissertation, she decided to get more involved in the state politics by running for a seat in the Utah House of Representatives. She soon discovered that she was a Republican in the third most Democratic district in the state. She started campaigning by going out and knocking on doors every night after work and every Saturday. Her children were “a great asset in helping” her run. Many of the people she met had children who were friends with her children. They were also helpful in distributing campaign materials.

Olene was elected to be a legislator and then served for eight years between 1980 and 1989. When she was first elected, she was one of only seven female legislators among a total of 104 in the state. Yet, she said, “I was treated very well in the legislature.” When she was first elected, the Speaker of the House told her to “get to know the budget.” She took his advice and “got to know it probably as well as anyone.” In fact, many male legislators would come and ask her questions about the budget. She learned it was important to understand where the money went, what the revenues were, and what the tax policies were. Although “rather unusual,” she was made chair of an Appropriations Committee during her second term. Despite the fact that hardly any females had been in leadership in the Utah legislature, Olene was elected assistant majority whip in her third term and then was elected majority whip in her fourth term. The legislature only met forty-five days a year so she continued employment as director of the Salt Lake Education Foundation during these years. Of course, she had interim meetings and continued her involvement in legislative committee work and other projects throughout the year.

To this day, Olene gets credit for the Rainy Day Fund in Utah. That particular bill took her two years to get passed. She felt strongly about it because she’d looked at the historical trends of the revenues for the state, and it became “very

obvious” to her that there were times when the state had to cut programs and raise taxes with the downturn. She figured that if money was put away for these times the state would be far better off in the long term. At the time it passed in Utah, only one other state had this fund. Now, nearly all states have a similar fund. One year she sponsored and was successful in getting more bills passed than any other legislator. She quickly determined that was not necessarily what she wanted to be known for and was more selective after that. She sponsored many critical pieces of legislation including the Utah Consumer Credit Code, the Insurance Code, the Juvenile Corrections System, and Human Services Legislation.

Olene said that serving in the legislature gave her continual practice in speaking, writing, negotiation, compromise, budgeting, problem solving, and taking criticism gracefully. She said,

The legislature is a great education; better than any other kind of training for government leadership because it helps you see how the state runs, get to know the budget, and learn about different programs. It's a great training ground!

She also received a lot of practice in analyzing data and trends and finding solutions. Running a campaign also gave her practice in gaining support, obtaining funds, and rallying the troops—all important competencies needed as governor. She said, “I enjoyed the legislature and found it remarkably informative and challenging.

Director of Community Development

After eight years of serving in the House of Representatives, Olene was defeated. She knew she was always a target being in such a Democratic district, but the defeat was still very traumatic for her. However, she had “a lot of amazing offers,” so she was able to move on fairly quickly. She accepted a position as the director of community development for the State of Utah and worked in this capacity for two years. She was over libraries, the art council, history, state fairs, housing, services for the homeless, community service, and more, and she “thoroughly enjoyed it.” She also said it was great preparation for her future positions.

Lieutenant Governor

In 1991, Olene decided she wanted to serve in elected office again. She explained,

I decided to run for Congress because I got angry with the federal auditors over housing. However, while I was running and doing well in the polls, I was asked by the governor [Mike Leavitt] to run with him as lieutenant governor. Although Congress sounded interesting and challenging, Myron was still involved in his business endeavors and had no interest in moving to Washington. Our family was in Utah, and it would have been terribly difficult for me to relocate. I understood Utah's issues and problems from the legislature and other

experiences. In Washington, I would have been one of 435. It didn't take me too long to figure out that I was better off staying in Utah.

Olene ran for lieutenant governor with Mike Leavitt three consecutive times and served in this role nearly eleven years. She enjoyed this position and said they worked together very well as a team. In looking at the nation, she believes they “got along probably better than most any other lieutenant governor and governor in the United States.” She said, “He had a great deal of respect for me, and I for him.”

Olene was able to use all of her previous experience and knowledge to perform effectively in her position as lieutenant governor. As lieutenant governor, she chaired the Health Policy Commission for seven years, developing critical health care policy. She spent three years chairing the Workforce Task Force, which created legislation that moved twenty-six different programs from five different departments into one unified department. This basically changed welfare to a process of gaining employment. During these years, she was also part of the budgeting process and usually sat in on all judicial appointments. She also established the State Volunteer Office. She noted, “If you don't care who gets the credit, you can get a lot done as lieutenant governor.” As previously mentioned, Olene was recognized by peers in other states as they elected her to chair the National Conference of Lieutenant Governors and to serve as the president of the National Association of Secretaries of State.

Governor

Olene said that she never had plans to become the governor, but that “it just happened.” She always knew as a lieutenant governor that there was always the possibility of becoming governor if something happened. During his last term as governor, Mike Leavitt was asked by President George W. Bush to accept a post to head the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). He accepted the invitation, and Olene was sworn in as Utah's fifteenth governor at the age of seventy-two on November 5, 2003. She was excited about the challenge and the opportunity to accomplish many important initiatives.

Six weeks before she became governor, she and her staff immediately began to strategize on what they could get done in the fourteen months she would be in office. She carefully considered which issues would have the greatest impact on the State of Utah and how to implement effective change in such a short time period. Olene and her staff decided on sixteen initiatives they wanted to move forward in fourteen months—more than one each month. She believes that starting her governorship with a plan of action and deadlines helped her become a successful governor. She also believes she was successful because of her ability through the years to learn from a wide variety of paid and non-paid positions and experiences, each contributing to important skill development and intellectual insight needed to understand the complexity of running a state government. Several of her initiatives that she is particularly proud of are the reading initiative that encourages families to read with their children twenty minutes every

day, tax reform principles that would give greater stability to the state budget, and the program that helped foster children become integrated into society as they entered into adulthood. She left office with an eighty-seven percent approval rating.

CAREER AND WORK-LIFE ISSUES

Career Path

Olene never became a university professor or school superintendent as she had originally envisioned. Her life obviously moved in other directions. She did, however, teach a few college classes but ultimately decided that she “could have a greater influence” in her role as legislator, lieutenant governor, and governor than she would have had in the classroom. In serving in such a prominent position, she felt she had a hand in making important changes that have benefited many Utah residents throughout the years. She obviously did not have a formal career plan targeted at being a state legislator, let alone the governor. In fact, she doesn’t remember ever thinking about becoming a lieutenant governor or governor until she was well into her legislative service. Yet, she believes she has had many different avenues throughout her life to develop the leadership competencies needed for successful service in prominent positions. Olene has been honored by having the Utah Affordable Housing Fund named after her. She received the National Points of Light award. She has received numerous awards for her legislative work, her community service work, her human service work, as well as her work in education. She has also received honorary Ph.D. degrees from three different universities.

Gender

Olene spoke for a few minutes about the gender issues she faced. She remarked that she did not like to dwell on gender barriers but does admit that being a female in the political environment was sometimes challenging. She didn’t even consider many career options throughout much of her life because she had no female role models in those arenas. In fact, she actually felt a “real burden as the first female governor,” because she believes that she needed to change the image for young women growing up today. She admits she has confronted gender issues from time to time and told the following humorous story to provide one example:

I’ve had issues from time to time, but I don’t dwell on them. I remember when I was leading the youth organization for young women in my church group; I was sitting in a leadership meeting with the men who lead the scouting and young men’s program. The man in charge of the young men wanted to take the boys on a rafting trip down the Snake River. And I pitched in and said, “Great. I think our young women would enjoy that as well.” He said, “Oh, why don’t you just consider doing something on the Jordan River?” Now you have to re-

alize that the Jordan River is a small, very slow river that runs through town. I think I threw my lesson manual at him. There were moments.

Work-Life and Motherhood

Even with occasional gender-related challenges, Olene believes that her role as a mother and volunteer gave her the flexibility to pursue interests that she might otherwise not have pursued. In fact, many people have asked her through the years how she was able to accomplish what she did. She feels she was always very fortunate to be in a position where she was able to pursue her interests. She explained:

One of the things I have learned is that in the workplace, in the political arena, and even in community service, it is important that if you have constructive opinions or creative ideas, you express them, even if it means taking risks.

Although Olene's primary focus for many years was caring for her family, she stayed involved with community efforts, part-time paid employment, advanced education, and church service. She remembers "time being very precious during those years." She did struggle with the conflict that exists between work and family because she integrated them closely. In fact, she said that she sometimes felt guilty, but she decided not to dwell on it too much. She explained,

I've often felt that there are a lot of things that I just do to get by—housework, for example. I never had domestic help in the home, and we just kind of got by okay. When my kids were younger, we always thought they should be involved in housework. They helped a lot. When my kids were younger, I also did a lot of sewing. I made a lot of clothes and prom dresses. Finally, I reached the point and decided it wasn't worth my time. After that, we just purchased them. I just didn't have time to sew anymore. I had to prioritize my time, and being a mother helped me learn to do this well.

She chose to work part time for many years because she loved being involved with her children's lives and activities. She continues to see the value of part-time employment today.

Through various part-time positions there was no question that I gained important knowledge and skills that were definitely useful in my later leadership positions. Remember, these were the days we had to use typewriters and White-Out so things took longer. I really had to manage my time with my motherhood responsibilities of carpools, cooking, and cleaning, and I learned to multitask even better.

Olene also believes that motherhood taught her a great deal that has been helpful in her numerous leadership roles, including that of governor. She said,

I think it teaches you sacrifice. It certainly teaches you negotiation because you're always negotiating between children. It teaches you to prioritize, be-

cause I really did have seven children each with their own priority needs. My oldest was eleven when my youngest was born. I hit the tops of the icebergs. I couldn't always get everything done, so I had to prioritize. I think motherhood teaches you responsibility. I drove the carpools and attended so many events and games. When another mother couldn't drive, one son would often say, "Oh, my mom will drive." So, I think that my kids had the sense that I could be there and be responsible.

Overall, Olene believes that women can accomplish a great deal if they understand that they may not be able to do everything at once, but that there are various stages in life. She was able to make time to raise her children, make time to pursue an education, and make time to become very involved in community service and politics. She said, "Although challenging, it can be done."

LEADERSHIP STYLE AND ADVICE

I asked Olene how her former staff would describe her leadership style. She said they would first comment about her energy level and strong work ethic. They would also say that she understood policy as well as anyone in the state. They would describe her as committed, caring, and competent. They would say that she was also a good listener and preferred hearing various viewpoints from a variety of individuals and groups. Olene stated,

Although I may not be a truly reflective individual in some respects, I've always thought leadership was the ability to get things done. I look and say, "These are the things we need to do. Let's get them done." I've always had a hectic schedule, so I didn't have a lot of time to ponder.

Her staff would also tell me that she has a very ethical and honest leadership style. She also liked to use facts and figures to justify her positions and efforts because she believed that rational justifications would convince others to follow and support her work.

Throughout the past few decades, Olene has been asked to give advice to other women. She believes that women should take advantage of every opportunity they are given. Women must be willing to enter into new experiences, map out their goals, and pursue an education. She said, "While I didn't actually need a Ph.D. to be a legislator, lieutenant governor, or governor, the fact that I have those degrees opened doors for me." She encourages young women to get as much education as they can and get involved in their communities. She said,

If you have interest in being a leader at the local or state level, then volunteer to be on boards. Seek out opportunities to serve and have leadership experiences. Analyze what needs to be done in your community and come up with suggestions of how to accomplish things. Energize others to get involved in your projects, yet remember that when it's done it is important that they feel like it was their idea and their success!

FINAL THOUGHTS

After she left office, Olene served a full-time mission with her husband in New York City for her church. At the time of this writing, she has returned to Utah and continues to accept speaking engagements for many events. She also continues to serve on a variety of boards and advisory committees. Through the years, she has dedicated her life to her family and community, as she has served in various capacities and led many positive efforts that have benefited thousands of Utahans throughout the state.

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