

# KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

CECILE RICHARDS INTERVIEW  
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**Cecile Richards**  
**President, Planned Parenthood (2006-2018)**  
**Interviewed by Noah Remnick**  
**Date of Interview: June 17, 2022**  
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START TC:00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Life Story Features  
Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Cecile Richards  
President, Planned Parenthood (2006-2018)

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NOAH REMNICK:

Roe V. Wade has defined and made possible so much of the work you've been a part of throughout your career. In the half century or so, since it was decided, how has Roe transformed American life and in particular, the lives of women?

CECILE RICHARDS:

When Roe versus Wade was decided by the Supreme Court, it was decided in part because actually young, healthy women were dying in emergency rooms across the country. And in fact, I've spent time with doctors who were doing their residencies at the time and they tell really the most tragic stories. So when the decision came out, it completely changed so many things, not only about women's health and their wellbeing, reduced maternal mortality, but it also just created a whole new set of opportunities for women. We know now that more women were able to finish school, they were able to finish high school, college. Many went on to get graduate degrees, and in fact, I think today more than half the law school students in this country are women. And none of that was true before Roe.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

It also improved children's health. We reduced child poverty. The chances for children to actually get through school rose. And so it completely transformed the landscape I think for women, their opportunities for their lives, that they could pursue a career. They could raise a family when and if they decided to. So it's hard to overstate how different life was for women over the last 50 years than it was before.

NOAH REMNICK:

And what do you see is at stake now that the rights that once guaranteed are imperiled?

CECILE RICHARDS:

Well, unfortunately I already know, as someone from Texas and I've spent a lot of time in Texas over the last several months, you know, earlier last year, a law was passed in Texas and signed into law that essentially ended all access to legal abortion in the state after six weeks of pregnancy, which of course is before many women know they're even pregnant. And we've seen already what's happened, particularly for folks in rural areas, women with low income, young people who have no one to turn to. It has absolutely changed their ability to make their own decisions about pregnancy. Women have had to flee the state going to Oklahoma and Mississippi and New Mexico and Colorado.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And of course, I think it's just the beginning because we are poised now for a Supreme court decision that potentially will end legal access to abortion in 26 states in this country. We won't know, of course, until all these laws go into effect, exactly the impact. But we do know what it looked like before abortion was safe and legal in America. And so I think we can kind of predict that for a whole new generation of women, their ability to make their own decisions about their pregnancy are no longer going to be theirs. They're going to be in

the hands of politicians and government officials. And that is going to change the opportunities for generations.

NOAH REMNICK:

You were around 16 years old when Roe was first decided. Do you have any memories from that time hearing about the decision and watching the nation respond?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I grew up in Texas. I will be honest. I didn't know about Roe. I didn't know. I wasn't paying attention to abortion. My mother was very involved in the women's rights movement, so it was much on her mind, but I guess like a lot of teenagers... I don't know, I was interested in other things. Although I was a young activist, I was really more focused on what was happening in the Vietnam war, what was happening on the environment. And it wasn't until much later after I became a mom, I became the president of Planned Parenthood, that these issues became incredibly important to me. And that I think that's true for a lot of women in this country.

NOAH REMNICK:

So tell me a little bit more about your childhood and the kind of family and community that you were a part of.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Well, I was born in Waco, Texas, and then my mother left as soon as she could get out of there. We moved to Dallas and my dad was a civil rights attorney, labor lawyer. And my mother was what we called a housewife in those days. I mean, she was taking care of four kids. And we had sort of a traditional, I guess it was a traditional fifties sixties kind of household, except that my parents were really political and Dallas was a very, very conservative city. We were kind of against everything that was going on. And my parents were involved in campaigns, in the Farm Workers Movement and the Women's Movement and the Civil Rights Movement. And so I think from a really early age, I found out that being an activist was important, but it was also fun. I mean, those were all of our friends. And then eventually we moved to Austin, Texas, which was a much more hospitable place for my very progressive parents. And that's when I think we all got just sort of full swing into the movements, again for women's rights to end the war in Vietnam. And where I really learned that maybe this is something I could do for the rest of my life.

NOAH REMNICK:

What was your father like during your childhood? Can you just describe his civil rights work a little bit more and how he came to influence you?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

So my father was an only child, both my parents were, and his mother was very independent. She was part of the legal women voters. I think she started the legal women voters in Texas. She was from the east. And so she just had a

whole different point of view about what women could do than was sort of the traditional norm in Texas. And my dad became a labor lawyer. He represented unions in Dallas, and worked with the farm workers. And then he also really supported and brought several lawsuits on conscientious objectors to the Vietnam war. That was my upbringing, was sort of fighting the powers that be. And so my dad had a huge influence on me. I became a union organizer right out of college. He's still alive today. I realize this is a time limited interview, but even here at the age of 89, he's still filing lawsuits against the Lieutenant governor of Texas. So he is one of those kind of unrepentant activists, very progressive, really out of step with a mainstream of Texas, but proudly so.

NOAH REMNICK:

People obviously know your mother as a public servant and a political trailblazer, but what was your mother like as a mother growing up?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, it's funny. My mom was— She was always trying to do what was expected of her. So she was the perfect housewife in Dallas, Texas, which is kind of funny now if you look back and think, what was she thinking? I mean, she put on the perfect dinner parties. She threw the perfect holiday events, birthday parties, everything. She said, if it was in the glossy magazine, she was trying to do it. And she was taking care of four kids, which was not that uncommon in Texas at the time. She had no career. And so she threw herself

into political campaigns and things that would keep her mind busy. I think it wasn't until much, much later that she actually figured out she could do something other than take care of kids. And of course, once she did, we moved to Austin. She ran a political campaign for a young woman lawyer who wanted to be in the state house. And that was actually very uncommon in the time. We didn't have very many women in elective office. And actually all of us kids got involved in the campaign and we won. She won the race, which was really not expected.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Her name was Sarah Weddington. And of course she had argued the Roe versus Wade case. So she was already a trailblazer and a firebrand. Mom went to work for her in the Capitol. And then at some point, mom thought, well, I guess if these other women can run for office, I guess I can too. And so she started her political career relatively late in life. I mean, we weren't all grown, but she had been doing that for many years. But man, once she got into it, she fell into it with a vengeance. It was clearly what she was meant to do. And of course eventually ran for governor of Texas and in almost a complete miracle, we won that race, too.

NOAH REMNICK:

And what was her style like as a parent raising all those kids in Texas at the time?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, she was very demanding of herself. She grew up in a family... Her mother— her parents came up during the depression. She was raised in a family that didn't have much. Her mom made all my mother's clothes. And in fact, it's kind of funny that she married my father because they were definitely on the opposite sides of the track in Waco, Texas. But she was tough. Her mother was tough on her and she expected a lot from all of us. I'm sure, at the time, it wasn't that much fun, but I clearly got my work ethic and my sense of, you know, you're on this earth for a reason. I got that from my mother. She really believed, particularly as she got older, you have one life, you have one chance to make a difference in this world. And so you better take it.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And she was a lot of fun. I mean, listen, she was hilarious. I mean, there were so many stories, Ann Richards stories, which we do not have time to go into today, but I'll never forget. I finally went away to college. I thought I've got to get out of this family. I got to go see what the rest of the world is like. So I went as far away as I could. Went to Rhode Island and I remember flying home into the Austin airport and my mother was there to greet me in a Dolly Parton costume. And I mean, all the way, like full on. Now, those were during her drinking days, but there was nothing for mom that was over the top. Nothing was too much. And I think she just sort of brought that, whether it to politics or to child rearing or to just enjoying life. That was her approach.



NOAH REMNICK:

What were the expectations that she had for you that she was trying to cultivate in you?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

You know, I think she probably had the same expectations for me. I was the eldest daughter, eldest child. And I mean, they had no idea how to raise kids. They were very young and so I had to be perfect. And so there was a lot of expectations, I think, at a very early age. But eventually she really had the same expectations for me that she had for other women. She saw so many women, and I know this was a reflection on her own experience, that women waited until they were perfect to do the next thing. Right. They waited until they were asked, whether it was to run for office, whether it was to be in charge of something. Even though she knew women were behind the scenes, running everything. And she was extremely impatient with how much we all held back.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And in fact, I think the best example of what my mother expected of me was, you know, I had been invited to interview for this big job to run Planned Parenthood. And I literally— I was already working at the time I had a job, but I almost didn't show up because I just felt like, "I don't know how to do that. I've never had a job that big." All the things, fill in the blank. And so I

stopped in a coffee shop and I called my mother and I said, "I just don't think I can do that. The kids are this, I've got to get the kids there." All these things. And she just said, "Cecile, get it together. This is the most important job you could ever have in your lifetime. Planned Parenthood is the most important healthcare provider to women in this country. You will never forgive yourself if you don't try. And what's the worst thing that could happen?"

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And honestly, as a result, I went to the interview and then eventually I got the job and did that for more than 12 years, the most important thing I've ever gotten to do in my lifetime. But so that was really Mom. She was a big believer in not only pushing other women to do more, but linking arms with them and walking down the road together. I mean, it's funny when she was governor of Texas, because she was sort of like a unicorn, like there were not—I don't know if there were any other women... progressive women governors anywhere in the country. And some women I got to know later said, "When your mom was governor, she invited any woman she could find in the country to come to the governor's mansion and go to what she called, governor girls school." And as a result, women like Kathleen Sebelius and Janet Napolitano, who went on to become governor of Arizona, you know, Kathleen became governor of Kansas. They said, what a big difference that made, right. Is that Mom was, "If I can do it, you can do it, too." And that was her attitude till the end of her life.

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NOAH REMNICK:

Your mother was such an extraordinary woman in so many different ways. It's impossible to enumerate them all. But she was also someone who, as you mentioned, suffered for a long time from alcoholism. When and how did you first realize that she had a drinking problem?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, I think as kids, both my parents drank. I mean, everyone drank when we were growing up. I mean, their parties were legendary and that was just sort of part of life, part of the social scene. But it wasn't until I was in high school that... No one talked about alcoholism. We didn't even know that was a thing. We just knew she drank too much. And it wasn't until later that some friends of hers really organized and they called an intervention, where we all gathered together and just said, "Your drinking is really harmful to you, but it's also harmful to the rest of us." It was probably the hardest thing I've ever been part of in a personal way, but she heard it and she went and got treatment and that was it. She never drank again. And I think that— And it was hard because a lot of her friends, they continued drinking, you know, my dad continued to drink.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

It wasn't that this was somehow everybody changed. But I think she knew that she had big ideas and big plans for what she wanted to do with her life. And drinking was getting in the way of that. And, of course, she did

something that also was unheard of, which is as an elected official, she was public about it, about her sobriety and about getting treatment. And she spent the rest of her life as well, helping people who wanted to get sober. I still run into people. I'll be in an airport or at a women's event and someone will come up to me and say, "It's because of your mom, I got sober." And that was a really important part of her journey. And as she used to say, you know, even when she ran for office, because of course this was brought up in every campaign she had. She said, "You just kind of got to take me warts and all." And I do think that was part of her... That was part of her appeal because people appreciated she wasn't trying to pretend to be anything she wasn't and her sobriety was a big part of that.

NOAH REMNICK:

Wondering if you could set the scene for us a little bit with the intervention, what do you recall from that? And what did you tell her about how her alcoholism was affecting your life?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, it was kind of a meeting at a friend's house. I can't remember which one of our family friends and I was there, my brother was there, and some of her best friends. And I remember telling her, "I'm afraid to get in the car with you." Right. "I'm afraid to be with you when you've been drinking." It wasn't that... She was never violent with anyone. She was never... It wasn't that. It was just really unsafe. And as a kid, I worried, obviously, you know, I'd gone

to college. I was worried about my brothers and my sister that were still at home. And honestly, it wasn't anything more than that. It did not take much. I mean, she knew she had a drinking problem. Being confronted with it by her family and friends was enough. And I mean, going to treatment was hard, this was not like the glamor days of going to treatment at some fancy place. This was hard knocks. But she only had to go once and that was really it.

NOAH REMNICK:

Did you ever butt heads with your parents growing up?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Oh my God. Of course I butted heads with my parents all the time. I mean, over what I was going to wear, where I was going to go. But I wouldn't say... They were not helicopter parents as we talk about now, you know, with kids. I mean, we had a lot of freedom. They were— They had a lot of freedom. I mean, they had a whole big life, so they weren't spending time with us all the time. And I don't think it's... I think with every kid pushes boundaries. It's funny though, because I've spent so much time with young people in my career and so many young people that I know who have to fight their parents over politics, over issues. That was never the deal with my parents. I mean there were things I did that... I mean I was arrested a few times, but I never felt like they were judging me. I was just a little bit different than they were. But they really— I mean we saw eye to eye on most issues. So I think that the kinds of times we fought were over the silly things, not the really important

things. And I just think that's the role of teenagers to rebel. And I think my parents got that.

NOAH REMNICK:

You brought it up so we got to hear about it. What were the arrest stories from your youth?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Oh, well I wasn't even that young when I got arrested, I mean, I'd had a baby at that point because I was living in LA. I was a union organizer. I organized immigrant janitors that were cleaning office buildings. At that point I'd been in the labor movement for a while. I was really completely and still am committed to people earning a living wage. And it was hard to get attention in Los Angeles for the plight of janitors, mainly who cleaned office buildings at night, they were immigrants. Most of them were from Latin America. They didn't speak English. Most of the people that worked in these buildings were completely unaware of who was cleaning their office building at night. And so we had to get arrested a few times just to get attention and it worked. I mean, actually it's one of the campaigns I'm most, most proud of in my life.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

We eventually won, not only better wages, good wages for janitors in Los Angeles, but healthcare benefits and job protection and the kinds of things

that they needed. But, you know, it wasn't that rough. It was a great campaign and honestly, it was an honor to go to jail for those folks.

NOAH REMNICK:

What are some of the stories of kind of Texas toughness that exemplified your family?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Texas toughness? Well look, I mean, of course it's— A lot of it is apocryphal. It's just like how the state began. You know what I mean? Particularly you look at the stories of Texas women who were frontier women who were raising babies, building homesteads, growing their own vegetables. I mean, that was part of the whole growing up. I mean, my mother, her parents grew their own food. Her mother literally built her own house. In fact, when my Mom was... Well, my grandmother was pregnant with my mother, they lived outside of town in a little community called Lakeview. And there was no way that my mother was going to be born in a hospital. I'm sure they didn't have the money. And that was just not what you did.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

The baby was born at home. And the story goes—I mean, I think this is a perfect example of how tough my grandmother was, but the story goes that she had organized the neighbor lady to come over whenever she went into labor, so that she could cook dinner for my grandfather. Because, of course, it

was unthinkable that he would make dinner for himself, even though he was a great guy, I'm sure he would've been capable of it. But anyway, she goes into labor. The neighbor lady comes over and my grandmother planned chicken for dinner, but it turns out that the neighbor had no idea how to kill a chicken. And so as the story goes, my grandmother hoists herself up on one elbow in labor, in the birthing bed and rings the chicken's neck. And that's how Ann Richards kind of came into the world.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

So, in all of those things, even though we obviously didn't grow all of our own vegetables. When we lived in Austin, when my parents moved there from Dallas, I mean, we had our own organic farm. We raised chickens. We did all of these things because it's just kind of what you did. And I'm sure there are other examples, but I mean, both my parents were tough. They took on tough issues. They were not afraid to be unpopular. And I know that they just had a huge influence on me. I mean, I was never in with the cool kids. We were always— you know, seventh grade wearing a black arm band to my seventh grade school that I had really just started and being called to the principal's office. I mean, it was kind of scary, but it was also felt like, okay, this is the right thing to do. I got the attention of the principal. So that was, I think, the toughness that I experienced growing up.

NOAH REMNICK:



You've always prided yourself on making trouble, as you put it. When did you first begin questioning authority in the Texas of your youth and where do you think that instinct came from?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Well, I mean the whole idea of questioning why things were the way they were was absolutely born out of the dinner table and my family. And we were always supporting candidates who couldn't win, you know, progressive folk. My dad had already argued before the Supreme court, over folks... conscientious objectors to the Vietnam war, people who refused— I remember a professor in Dallas that refused to sign a loyalty oath. So he already was demonstrating what it looked like to challenge authority. I remember going as a very young kid, we drove down to south Texas on the Rio Grande border to help kick off the farm workers' march to Austin, where they were fighting for a living wage. And frankly, just the protections that other workers got. So those to me are the memories of my childhood, much more than anything else.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And then, of course, when we moved to Austin, again, it's the height of the Vietnam war. My dad is working for labor unions and he's working for conscientious objectors to the war. I wore a black arm band to school in seventh grade, called in the principal's office who called my mother to nark me out. And of course his good fortune was she wasn't at home. And then I

remember too, in seventh grade, I believe it was the very first Earth Day, which is kind of interesting the things you remember as a child. But I remember making a poster for Earth Day. We didn't know anything about Earth. I mean, this was like a whole new idea, but it completely made such an impression on me that I then in seventh grade, got some of my other girlfriends that we started a recycling club in Austin, Texas, which also, I mean, now recycling's very common at the time my dad thought I was nuts.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

But those early experiences really taught me that if you see a problem, then you gotta take a stand and do something. Even if it's just your small part. I do think it sort of set me on the path for the way I spent the rest of my life.

NOAH REMNICK:

What was your sex and reproductive education like growing up in Texas? Did your parents ever talk to you about sex or birth control?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I would say my experience in Texas growing up with sex education was de minimus. I think we all remember... Any girl growing up at that time in Texas, we got something from Kotex, which was about sanitary napkins. That was something, there was a big assembly that the boys didn't come to. And there was some little Disney film, but there was no conversation about birth control or sex. And really with my parents, not till much, much later. I think

they, frankly, like other Texas parents and probably parents of that era, they were totally ill-equipped.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

But it's interesting, my good friend in junior high, her mother was a big volunteer at Planned Parenthood. And so we always knew that Planned Parenthood existed, if anyone needed birth control or kind of got into trouble. But I wouldn't say that my parents played a big role in this. And it's— I mean, I know that's true today. Is just parents feel really unprepared and not supported. That's why it was a big part of what we tried to do at Planned Parenthood is give people the tools. And frankly, young people information, particularly if they couldn't get it from their parents.

NOAH REMNICK:

Were you always pro-choice?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Always, I mean, not that I would even know what that word meant necessarily, but— And even though, you know, kind of my path was much more on labor rights. I mean, I spent many, many years in the labor movement organizing women. So I believed in women's rights, but I kind of went there at a different route. It wasn't until much later, really becoming a mom, I think is the thing that made me the most adamantly pro-choice. I have

a daughter, an eldest daughter. I had twins. I got pregnant on the campaign, mom's campaign for governor and we had twins, which was wild at the time.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And then later I got pregnant. I was on birth control and my husband had decided not to have another child. So I had an abortion after being a mom. And all of those experiences really... I mean, they just confirmed and reaffirmed for me that this is a decision nobody can make, except the person who's pregnant because no one has any idea what your life is like. And it's why I have so much empathy. Majority of women in this country who have an abortion are already moms. And so they do that with full recognition of the responsibility, the joy, the obligations of being a parent.

NOAH REMNICK:

Were there ever moments growing up when you questioned the principle of pro-choice or when you were particularly challenged on it by members of your community?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I never remember. I mean, we lived in a progressive town, progressive community, and I don't remember anyone ever challenging me on the issue of abortion. As I say, I think growing up, those were not the issues that were sort of animating my activism. And I can't remember a time when I really got into

it, obviously that happened a lot during my 12 years at Planned Parenthood. But I don't remember as a young person, this issue coming up.

NOAH REMNICK:

You've talked about a little bit, but after college you worked for years as a labor organizer. I'm wondering what lessons you learned in that role that you carried with you for the rest of your career?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

When I was in college, as I said, I went away to school, I went to Rhode Island. I'd never even been to Rhode Island. It just like... it sounded like fun. And so I was definitely a fish out of water there. There were very few kids from Texas and I immediately got involved in a janitor strike on campus and it made a huge influence on me. Because I was sort of thinking, oh my God, I'm at this really fabulous college and it's progressive and all that. And then I realized immediately that I was taking the side of the janitors, not the university. And when I graduated from school, I became a union organizer. I moved to— First, I worked with garment workers on the Rio Grande border. Then eventually I moved to New Orleans, organized hotel workers. Anyway, that's how I met my husband. We were union organizers together. And, you know, mainly women working for minimum wage, you know, in nursing homes and hotels as janitors, as garment workers.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And it was a huge education for me. I mean, it probably was the most influential job I've ever had in my lifetime because I spent my days in living rooms and on street corners, talking to people who, despite having very few options in terms of their employment, were willing to risk everything to try to make things better. And they knew probably it wasn't going to get that much better for them, but they had kids, they had coworkers, they lived in communities where they thought it's worth fighting for something. And that, I guess that courage and that determination, and having the chance to actually never live the lives that they lived, but really see it for years, is probably—made the most difference on how I approach work and how I approached my activism.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Remember, I mean, there's a million women I still remember and people I still remember, but particularly once we moved to California and I was organizing janitors, these are folks who had actually fought their way, whether it was from Guatemala or Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras had risked so much. Many had left their families behind to get to California where they could work as a janitor. And most of them were working, of course, two jobs. They were working at night as janitors. And then they had whatever daytime hustle they could get. And yet, they were willing to risk all of that. Everything they had done to fight for a living wage for janitors, knowing that they could get fired. And many of them did, but that kind of courage? I mean, people used to always say to me, "Wow, your job—" Particularly when I worked at Planned

Parenthood, "God, your job must be so hard." And it's like, listen, there's nothing harder than cleaning 13 hotel rooms a day for minimum wage in New Orleans, or working in a nursing home in east Texas with no benefits and no job guarantee. That's what hard work is. And I feel like I tried to spend the rest of my life figuring out ways to make life better for the community of people that I worked with.

NOAH REMNICK:

So when you were 30 years old, you decided to move back to Texas to help your mother campaign for governor. What do you recall about that campaign and what was it like working with her?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, the campaign for Mom to run for governor was so nutty. And now that I look back on it's like people today would go, "That was not a campaign." My husband and I were living in LA, we were union organizers. We had a daughter and Mom called and said... I mean, this is the kind of campaign it was. She said, "I need everybody back. We're going to do this thing." So of course, what are you going to do? Your mom asked you to come back. She wants to run for governor. So we packed up the U-Haul, all of our meager possessions and drove back and moved to Austin and worked in the campaign. And I mean, literally worked in the campaign. Our youngest daughter, Lily grew up in the campaign. It was one of those campaigns... I mean, sometimes I think of it like a Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland, like let's put

on a show kind of thing because it was all Mom's friends. Some of whom had some serious political chops, but it was not a national campaign in the sense you think of now in a big high profile governor's race.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Probably because no one thought she could win. The good thing was Kirk and I were organizers. So we knew how to organize. And that was really how we spent our days, is organizing really the grassroots movement that probably was the deciding difference at the end of the day, because it was like we got folks to turn out to vote. And we worked with folks in the labor movement, the teachers, women, students, LGBTQ folks who had really never been invited into campaign life before. And it was... I mean it was exhilarating. It was exhausting. It changed all of us. I've been to practically every county in the state of Texas. And there were 254. And it's funny because I think it was Sam Rayburn, Texas politician, who I used to say about Lyndon Johnson, "If they can't see the candidate, they want to see the candidate's family."

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And so a big part of my job and really Lily, my daughter's job was, we drove all over the state of Texas, and we went to county fairs, and we were in parade floats and we went to county courthouses, and we would do the local radio station. And that was kind of how we put the whole thing together. Mom was a great candidate. I mean, she was way too progressive for the state of Texas. As we've discussed, she had her faults, but she didn't try to hide



them. It's still kind of a miracle that we won that race. We were running against a guy, though, who made some big mistakes and we were able to take advantage of them, but I don't think we ever had a poll showing us winning. And it was one of those elections that we won on election day because people were just determined and, you know, so that was kind of how it went.

NOAH REMNICK:

Then in 1988, your mother gave the keynote speech at the DNC. I'm wondering if you could describe that night from your point of view, where were you as you listened to her speak?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Mom got invited to give the keynote speech to the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta. And she was in office at the time, but she wasn't running for governor yet. And it was a huge opportunity. In fact, there had only been one other woman that had ever made the keynote speech at the Democratic Convention, that was Barbara Jordan, another amazing Texas woman. But we all went. It was like this was big. And in fact, my two brothers, my sister, we all went to the convention. My husband came. Lily, who was just really a toddler at the time. And we sat on the stage, which I think also probably doesn't happen anymore. I don't know, but it was such an electrifying evening. And you could tell that she was ready. I mean, there had been a lot of prep for this.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, what dress she was going to wear, rewriting the speech, deciding which jokes stayed in, which didn't. So we were all pretty familiar with what was going to happen, but she killed it that night. She just really did. And that was what launched her opportunity to run for governor of Texas. That keynote speech just put her on the national stage in a way that she never would've been before. And so it was great fun. And that was actually, my mother talked about Lily, because at that point that was her first grandchild and they became... I mean over the years they got to be very, very close. But I remember my husband and I later, at the after parties, someone had made him a little name tag that said, "I'm Lily's dad." It was that kind of night. It was a total family extravaganza. And I think it did begin to portend a little bit foretell what might be coming for Mom.

NOAH REMNICK:

So then after four years in office, your mother was defeated in her bid for reelection by George W. Bush. That campaign was notoriously dirty. What did your mother and you think of George W. Bush at the time?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, it's funny because George Bush was really not— He wasn't even a politician. He was the son of... Right? There wasn't a lot of feeling about him. I think the difficulty was really about the campaign. Obviously, Carl Rove really cut his teeth. I mean, he went on to become such a famous and

infamous political strategist. It was the year that the Christian right became very involved in politics and Texas was one of those places. It was the year that Ralph Reed and the Christian coalition became involved in electoral politics. So it was a tough year and that was a year, not only did Mom— Mom got beat, Mario Cuomo, the very popular governor of New York got beat. The Democrats lost, you know, dozens of seats in Congress, Newt Gingrich was in his ascendancy.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

So, it's interesting at the time you take it very personally and you think, what could we have done? Where did we... Was it that she vetoed the concealed handgun bill? Was it... I don't know. There were always a lot of reasons. The truth is I think we were caught up in what was a national trend that was just impossible to overcome. And look, you know, George Bush had a great name to be on the ballot. There's just no doubt about it. I don't think at the time any of us imagined he would go on to be president of the United States, but that's how politics works.

NOAH REMNICK:

What did that experience teach you about American politics?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Well, I mean, I don't think I learned anything differently about politics in general, because we'd certainly been on our share of losing elections. I do

think what it told me was there was a group of folk and in Texas, not only in Texas, but certainly in Texas, that really wanted to move the Republican party to the right and use religion as a real battering ram in politics. And that was what happened to us. I mean, that was a big piece of this. There was a lot of anti-gay, anti-women, anti-abortion, sort of undercurrent, you know, really nasty messages about Mom. And it was sort of the dark side of electoral politics. And actually after the campaign, I started my own organization because I felt like we needed to try to right the ship or at least organize folks who didn't believe in that kind of political agenda.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And so I started the Texas Freedom Network, which still exists today. But I think it was who knew at the time, but that 94 year, really was the change in the Republican party. And again, we're seeing today just how deep that shift became. I'd say the folks that took over the Republican party in Texas that year are really now running the show all over the country. And I think it's sort of how we saw the rise of Donald Trump. It's how we've seen these attacks on democracy. Unfortunately, a lot of them started in Texas.

NOAH REMNICK:

You spent no small part of your life and career doing battle with the far religious right. What role, if any, has religion played in your life personally?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Well, it's kind of funny. I grew up in the Unitarian church in Dallas, because it was a safe haven. That was where I went to preschool. It was a very progressive place in Dallas. And as I said, Dallas was a pretty conservative community. We had great speakers. I met other kids there, some of whom I then got to know in Austin, at the Unitarian church there. So I think for my parents, it was much more of a place that they found community. They weren't particularly religious folks, but it was a very different view of religion and giving back, that was sort of the heart of the Unitarian church in Dallas. And it's interesting, in fact, the current pastor at the Unitarian church in Dallas, Reverend Daniel Canter is a friend. In fact, I just interviewed him because they are still doing amazing work.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And in fact, in this current abortion environment and they've been helping get women to New Mexico for safe and legal abortion. So I feel like those Unitarian roots were very strong and made a big impression. I spent some time going to the Methodist church as well in Austin. That was also a very progressive place. These were reconciling congregations that welcomed LGBTQ folks that supported women's rights and the issues that I cared about. So, I think those were— I began... I really have appreciated in my lifetime, the role that religion can play in the progressive community and have always felt it was important that we not allow certain people to define religion as being with one narrow political agenda. And unfortunately, I think some folks in the religious community have done that.

NOAH REMNICK:

So when did you first begin hearing about Planned Parenthood and describe what the organization was doing at that time?

00:44:44:00

CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, I first started hearing about Planned Parenthood when my friend Gina's mom, Betty Adams, was a volunteer and probably she was on the board. I mean, I'm not really certain, I was in junior high. And we just knew it was a place that you could get birth control. We knew it was a place that helped women, helped young people. And I mean, I didn't know a whole lot about it. I actually never went into a Planned Parenthood clinic until I was in Rhode Island in college. It's funny, I think I thought about Planned Parenthood the way most Americans do, which is that's a place you can go to and they'll get you healthcare or they'll talk to you about issues if you can't find anywhere else to go. I mean, something like one in four women in this country have been to Planned Parenthood and it continues to be today, after a hundred years, really a safe place for people to go. And not just women, I think anyone who wants information or access to reproductive healthcare.

NOAH REMNICK:

So you mentioned it briefly, but when was the first time you stepped into a Planned Parenthood and what brought you there and what did it mean to you? What were your impressions of it then?

00:45:57:00

CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, I remember I had gone to school in Rhode Island. I needed birth control. And those days going to get birth control on your campus, I mean, maybe you could. I don't know, but it wasn't what anyone thought of. And I went to the Planned Parenthood and they got me on birth control and they were... I mean, it was just like a good place to go. And it was— It was a safe place. And I mean, I was so proud actually years, years later, when I ran Planned Parenthood, I went and cut the ribbon on the new Rhode Island healthcare center in Providence. So at the time I would say it was kind of your classic sort of rundown, but welcoming place. And now they have this beautiful new health center that they built. But that's what Planned Parenthood has always been, you know, from its beginnings.

NOAH REMNICK:

How did the job at Planned Parenthood get on your radar in the first place? And what were you thinking about when you were finally offered it?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

So I was living in Washington, D.C. and I was already deeply into progressive politics. I had started an organization called America Votes, which was this effort to bring together all the progressive groups that were doing voter education, registration, voter turnout, everything from Planned Parenthood to the Sierra Club, to the human rights campaign, to Emily's List. And so I

knew all the folks, it was a great job. It was a great organization. It continues on to this day. And so I was very familiar with the current leadership of Planned Parenthood at the time. And so when she left... I mean, I knew the job was open, but it never occurred to me that that was a job that I could do. And the search firm called me. And as I've said, I mean, I was so incredibly honored that I would even be kind of on the list.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

But it took me a lot to go to the job interview because I think like a lot of women, I thought, okay, I already have this big job. I've got all these responsibilities. At that point I had three kids in school and I just, I don't know, it seemed inconceivable that would be something that I would ever be offered. And then if I got the job, what I would do? But I went through that process and they chose me, as we say. And we moved to New York, I had no idea what it was getting into. I think that's how a lot of women just, you know, we just kind of do the next thing that seems and needs doing. And it was the most extraordinary experience of my lifetime. An enormous honor, incredibly hard, but the people that work for Planned Parenthood, they do so out of a commitment. And so you meet the most amazing people and I did. And it was— And we went through some tough years. We went through some years where we were able to get amazing things done for women's healthcare, for reproductive healthcare, particularly with president Obama. So anyway, it was a lot.



NOAH REMNICK:

What did you see as your mission as the head of Planned Parenthood? What was your larger project?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

When I came to Planned Parenthood, I think one of the reasons they hired me is we were doing a fabulous job providing healthcare. You know, millions of patients every year. We were in every single state, but politics were getting in the way of our ability to care for the patients who were turning to us. More restrictive laws were being passed. I mean, it was harder in more Republican states, red states, and it was clear we kind of needed to rebuild our movement side. Planned Parenthood really has two parts, a trusted healthcare provider to millions of folks, but also we are a movement to advance and really make sure that reproductive healthcare is available to everybody, whether they're a Planned Parenthood patient or not. So I really was hired, I think, to help on the movement side. And we did. I mean, we dramatically increased the membership of Planned Parenthood. We invested in young people.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, millions of young people joined Planned Parenthood as activists, as leaders. Some of them have gone on to both lead Planned Parenthood, but also gone and ran for public office. So it was really, to me, important that we kind of build this whole new generation of activists. And then of course we

had the chance as a movement to influence the Affordable Care Act, which was frankly the most dramatic change in access to healthcare in our lifetime. And if we hadn't been at the table, if we had not had millions of supporters around the country that were pushing forward, we would not have made the progress particularly for reproductive health care that we did. So that to me was incredibly important, and we elected a lot of good folks, including president Barack Obama. Or I would say we helped elect.

NOAH REMNICK:

How did you deal with the threats of violence against you and your family when you were the head of Planned Parenthood? Did you ever grow numb to these or did they really get to you?

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CECILE RICHARDS

You know, I remember when I was taking the job, they had a security detail come and look at our house where we lived at the time in Washington. And I remember how excited my son was because it was someone looking at where the bad guys could get in. That was probably the most I ever heard about security for me because the truth is I was never afraid for myself, but I did spend an enormous amount of time and energy thinking about how we protected our doctors and our clinicians and our patients. Because the people who wanted to do harm, that's who they wanted to harm. And that unfortunately is still a big part of what Planned Parenthood has to do, is to

ensure excellent security, because nothing's more important than taking care of the people who are turning to us for care.

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CECILE RICHARDS

I think the other thing it's a little bit of a misnomer is... Definitely people come up to me on the street and sometimes say nasty things or give me religious pamphlets or those kinds of things. But for every one person who does that, there are 99 people who come up and say, thank you for what Planned Parenthood did for me, does for me, it's where I took my daughter. It's incredible. Frankly, the love and support you feel as someone associated with Planned Parenthood and it was deeply humbling.

NOAH REMNICK:

When did you realize it was time to step down from your role there? And why did you choose to take that step?

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CECILE RICHARDS

Well, I guess I always felt like 10 years seemed like a good amount of time. I came up in the progressive movement and I saw a lot of people who stayed, I think, beyond their sell date if you will. These are big important jobs and they're also amazing jobs. So that was sort of my horizon. I had this dream that we would elect Hillary Clinton president, and then we could sort of ride off into the sunset. I felt that the organization was in good shape for so many reasons. And then of course that didn't happen. Donald Trump was elected.

And so I stayed because we had to fight really what was an existential crisis, which was President Trump. And at that point, speaker Paul Ryan had pledged to completely defund Planned Parenthood, to end all federal funding for the basic care that we provided to Medicaid patients primarily. I mean, this was affordable birth control, pap smears, breast exams, well women checkups. For many women with low incomes, Planned Parenthood was the only place in their community they could go.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And so I stayed for that fight. We won that fight in a sort of, again, really unbelievable story of the sort of the night that John McCain basically cast the deciding vote to protect the Affordable Care Act and Planned Parenthood. But then after I finished that, I knew it was time for a new leader. I was deeply invested in young leaders of color, not only as part of the organization and part of my staff, but leading the organization. And so that was it. It just felt like, look, I could have stayed another 10, 20 years. I loved that. I loved that job, but I didn't want to overstay my welcome. And look at some point you go, you know, I set out to do certain things. We did them. I felt really good about what we had done. And it was... you can be, you can begin to believe your own press too much. Right. And think you're the only one who could do it. And I never, I never wanted to be in that situation. So I think I left after 12 years and it was good.

NOAH REMNICK:

You also served as deputy chief of staff for Nancy Pelosi. I'm wondering if you could tell me about that experience and what it taught you about politics and gender and politics.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Well, I did have this incredible honor to work for Speaker Pelosi when she was becoming— She actually was... became the democratic minority leader at that. At that point, the Democrats did not have control of the house. And I went in kind of to do a little bit of what I did at planned period, which was like, how do we connect all the things that were happening on Capitol Hill with these millions of people around the country who were working on important issues on women's issues on environment, on, I mean, fill in the blank. And it was a distinct honor because most people who had my job, I was deputy chief of staff. Most people on the hill who had those jobs had been on Capitol Hill for like 20 years, 25 years. I was blown away by... Not only by Ms. Pelosi. She's extraordinary. I am such a fan. I learned so much from her, but also the people who do commit their lives to Capitol hill.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

You know, some of the people that I met there, they were experts in so many issues. They were experts in how the hill worked and how Congress worked and how bills got passed. And they could have left any time and made a fortune as a lobbyist, working for a big firm, but they committed their life to public service. And so I felt like— And the friends I made there continue to be

some of my closest friends today. Really people who are so dedicated to their mission. Speaker Pelosi herself is, I don't know anyone with more energy. I don't know anyone with more strategic brilliance in how to move a very complicated caucus. The democratic caucuses from the left to the right and everything in between. And she knew how to count votes. That's why she's Speaker. And she knew how to get things passed. And I always felt like if she told you, she couldn't get the votes, it was because she couldn't get the votes. And if she said she would, she knew where they were and she got them. That is a really— I mean, I think people so underestimate her strategic abilities and I think she will go down in history as maybe the best speaker ever for the Democrats in history.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

Long after I left the speaker's office and was running Planned Parenthood, there was a critical moment in the attempt to pass the Affordable Care Act when no one was sure it was going to happen. We didn't have the votes. People had worked long and hard to get this together, including all of us at Planned Parenthood. And it seemed it was going to come down to a matter not of prescription drug coverage or anything else, but it was going to come down to the issue of abortion. And we had had this conversation at Planned Parenthood because what the Republicans were demanding was that abortion coverage be banned in all insurance plans in the country. And of course that would've been worse than how it currently was. And we had to

have a really tough conversation at Planned Parenthood with the board about what position we would take on the passage of the Affordable Care Act.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And I said, "We cannot support this. If there is an abortion ban for insurance coverage, we just can't." Even though we have literally spent months and months and so much time and energy getting this bill that had a lot of good things in it, but we can't support it. And so the board agreed and I went to meet with the speaker, and I was really anxious because I have so much respect for her. I knew that she was really the one person who could get the votes to pass this. And as I sat down in her office, she said, "Cecile, before we get started, we don't have the votes yet for this bill. And you know how important it is, but I'm just going to tell you this demand that we ban abortion coverage in the final bill. If that's in this bill, we're not going to have an Affordable Care Act because I'm not going to pass it."

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, that was Nancy Pelosi at her finest. Is a woman of principal, a woman who just said to her opponent, "I'm not going to pass it." And so she did my job for me and I'll never forget Friday night, the night before it passed Rosa DeLauro, one of her lieutenants, a great Congresswoman from Connecticut calling me and saying, "Cecile, we held him off. We backed him down." She said, "There were many men in the democratic caucus who were completely willing to pass this bill with an abortion ban, but the speaker and the rest of

us held." To me that is a perfect example of why Nancy Pelosi is, I think, the greatest speaker in the history of this country,

NOAH REMNICK:

A lot of people assumed when you stepped down from Planned Parenthood that you would soon run for political office, obviously you haven't decided to do so thus far. What goes into a calculation when making a decision like that?

01:00:46:00

CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, look, people run for office for all kinds of things. I've never really found something that I felt like I wanted to do more than what I was doing. I'm an organizer at heart, I'm a troublemaker, I'm a hell raiser. And there's only certain things you can do when you're in public office. And I also know how important it is. I saw it from Mom. I saw it from Speaker Pelosi. I've seen it from all the work I've done over my... There are good people in office who need people on the outside, both holding their feet to the fire, but also supporting them when they do the right thing. I saw that with President Barack Obama. There were things we got done that he might have liked to do, but he probably wasn't going to do unless we made him. In fact, I remember meeting with the president right after his election.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And he said, "Y'all's job is to make me do the right thing." Now, once he actually got into office, sometimes he didn't like how we did that, but that



was really important. And so I feel like we all, as progressives, as social justice folks, have to decide sort of where our energies are best spent. And for me, it's been in the movement side. And I hope that I've done my work in a way that can help good folks run for office. Good folks be better in office and move us forward in a way that, I guess we all are hopeful for, especially in this moment in this country.

NOAH REMNICK:

Your mother died in 2006 of throat cancer. What was your relationship like with her in her later years? And how did you cope with that loss?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, my mom and I were very close and... I mean, I trusted her. I still, of course, wish I could call her for advice. She ultimately was my mentor, I suppose, in addition to being my mom and she got sick right as I took this job at Planned Parenthood, it was literally the same month. And... So that was really hard because I had sort of started this move to New York. In fact, we'd rented this apartment that I was so excited because she loved New York and we'd rented an apartment that was big enough for her to come and be able to stay and hang out with us. And she never did. She was never able to come back and in fact really died very quickly. It was a really tough cancer. I spent time with her down at MD Anderson in Houston, watching Project Runway and doing the kind of stupid things you do with your mom.

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CECILE RICHARDS:

And it was really hard. I mean, I think anyone who's lost a parent, anyone who's lost a mom, it's sort of like there was a big hole in my heart and it's never really healed. And of course, because she was a public figure, people always come to me with stories about her. My friend Holland Taylor made a play about her. She sort of still lives in the memory of a lot of people. And whenever I go back to Texas, of course, there are people that worked on the first Ann Richards campaign, the second Ann Richards campaign. And they're part of my extended family. And so we share that. So I guess not only do I miss her, but there's a whole community of people who miss her. And I think particularly in these political times, there's so many people who just miss her in politics.

01:04:24:00

CECILE RICHARDS:

A lot of people just ask me, where's the Ann Richards that we need today? I think she'll always live on. She's an amazing... Of course, like mother, because she was so organized and thinking ahead, she designed her own headstone at the Texas cemetery. And honestly, if you ever go there, you got to go visit it because you can see it. Because everyone else's is like these big kind of phallic whatever... gravestones for men and hers looks like a dip cone. It looks like a twirly white hairdo, almost. And it's a wonderful place to remember her. And whenever I go back and visit in Austin, people have left little stones. Sometimes people, their sobriety pins... that's always how she wanted to be remembered is being part of the community.

NOAH REMNICK:

Did the enormity of her legacy ever feel like a burden on you?

01:05:33:00

CECILE RICHARDS:

Oh my God, of course. It's like, you're Ann Richard's daughter. You're supposed to be sort of this magical everything. But I— she never... that never felt like a burden with her. That never felt like a burden with her. She was proud of me in her own way. She had high expectations, but she never made me feel like there was something I was supposed to do that would make her feel better about me. And I think that's a big gift. That's the gift we can all give to our kids, is to be proud of them and give them the confidence and courage to do whatever it is they want to do. And she did that for me. I've tried to do that for my kids. I try to do that for other young people, because in many ways that's all they really need and want is our love and encouragement and confidence. And then they go on to do amazing things.

NOAH REMNICK:

Are there any favorite memories of her that you return to when you miss her most?

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CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, that's a really good question. I mean, it's hard to pick a certain memory. We did so many things together, but I guess what... It's funny

because she did spend the first half of her lifetime trying to be perfect for everybody, for her parents, for her husband, for society. Her liberation, later in life, and particularly even after she left office, when she could just be whoever she wanted to be. We traveled the world together. We did such amazing things together. We traveled to Russia, we traveled to South America. We went to a presidential inauguration in Mexico together and met Fidel Castro. She just sort of had the attitude that this is the only life you get. So if someone invites you to do something, you just say yes. And so, I guess some of my fondest memories are when she was really sort of Ann unplugged, unvarnished, unscripted. And that to me is a good reminder of how we can live our life.

NOAH REMNICK:

Our series of interviews attempts to convey what moral leadership looks like. I'm wondering how you define moral leadership and why there's such a need for it now?

01:08:22:00

CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, I think that as a person growing up where you have the opportunity and/or are kind of forced to witness injustice, whether it's racial or economic, gender. I think moral leadership is doing something about it and with all humility. And it may be something tiny and may be something big, but I feel like we were put on this earth to make a difference. And particularly people like myself who grew up with enormous privilege. I could do anything I

wanted to with my life, right. To me, I mean, the gift to me was being able to choose to be an organizer, to choose to be a troublemaker. And so I take that privilege seriously. And so I guess for me, moral leadership is taking the gifts that you were given and doing something with them to make the world better.

NOAH REMNICK:

So your daughter, Lily, has worked for many years now in politics. What lessons about the profession did you try to pass down to her over the years?

01:09:35:00

CECILE RICHARDS:

I would love to think that I taught my daughter Lily anything, but honestly I'm learning from her every day. And she learned a ton from my mother. Many days I feel like I was just a genetic link between Ann Richards and Lily Adams. She still remembers things on the first campaign that are unbelievable to me. And so she grew up quick. She was an adult before she was a child. I guess to me, if anything, I've tried to impart to Lily and to Hannah and Daniel, her twin brother and sister, is choose what you want to do with your life and stick with it. There are no rules. There's nobody telling you what you have to do. Lily is a very dutiful person. She's worked on presidential campaigns. She now works for Secretary Janet Yellon. She is committed. And so, I feel like my job is not to teach her anything, but it's just to support her in this really important and challenging work that she's chosen to pursue.

NOAH REMNICK:

Do you feel that there are particular ways you've had to curate your image as a woman in an exceptionally public role throughout your career?

01:10:53:00

CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, I'm sure there's ways I should have curated my image, but I never have. I mean, I do think that all of us are obligated to try to communicate with people who otherwise might just tune us out. And my mom really taught me that. I mean, she used to say, "If whatever you're saying can't be understood by your grandmother back in Waco, then no one's hearing it." And so I don't think it's so much about curating an image, but it's making things simple for people. And it's being direct about what you believe and what you're trying to do. I see so much, particularly coming out of politics, a lot of big words and complicated statements. When most people, they don't have time to think about all the issues that are coming at them in their lifetime and they just want to live their life. They want to take care of their families. They want to have some kind of security about the world, and it's our obligation to help make that possible.

NOAH REMNICK:

You spent a lot of your time since stepping down from Planned Parenthood, working to get more women elected to public office. Beyond demographic equity, what do you see as the importance of having more women run for and win public office? Is there something distinct about women's leadership?

01:12:19:00

CECILE RICHARDS:

Yeah, I think women, they just bring a different perspective. Once you've had kids, you have a totally different perspective on the world. I mean, one of the things I've always felt, is when half of Congress can get pregnant, we're going to finally quit fighting about access to safe and legal abortion, birth control, Planned Parenthood. But all the studies show, and it may be because we've never had equity in office, that women are more likely to introduce legislation and pass legislation successfully. They're more likely to work across the aisle with other people of another party or point of view. They're more likely to work with each other as women across party lines.

01:13:04:00

CECILE RICHARDS:

Most women, particularly now, if they're running for office, they're running for office because there's something they want to get done because there was no one that just tapped them on the shoulder and said, "Oh wow, you would be great." As a member of Congress, the burdens are still so big that unless you're really committed to doing something in office, it's hard for women to run. Now at some point maybe the world becomes more equal, but I do think that the women I know, and particularly young women as they're coming up as they're running for school board, running for city council, they're doing it because there's something they want to achieve and more likely than not, they do.

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NOAH REMNICK:

So a lot of progressives take comfort in the edict that the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice. Is that a notion that you believe in? Is that ever tested for you?

01:13:53:00

CECILE RICHARDS:

I mean, I guess we all believe or we wouldn't be progressives and we wouldn't be activists that the arc does bend towards justice, but it needs a lot of help getting there. And anyone right now in the United States who's a progressive activist has to be wondering how we need to shift and change and adjust in what is becoming an increasingly undemocratic, autocratic, almost totalitarian environment. And so whether it's the attacks on voting rights, which are just so core to our democracy, whether it's attacks on even just the electoral process, the effort to end access to safe and legal abortion, a right that we've had for 50 years. The thought that we're going backwards in all of these areas, I think you're causing everyone to try to rethink what more do we need to do? Because the rules don't exist anymore like they did for all of our lifetime. And this is the first time I have felt that so deeply. So yeah, I believe in progress, I believe in progressive change. I also believe it's harder now than ever before.

NOAH REMNICK:

Do you ever think about your own legacy? How would you like to be remembered?



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01:15:19:00

CECILE RICHARDS:

Well, I don't think about my own legacy, but I guess if I had to, I would think about— I would hope to be remembered as someone who liked to organize, liked to build community and had a good time doing it. I think one of the things that we forget is that life has to be joyful. And I think organizing and hell raising and even working in electoral politics can be really fun and hard, but you got to bring joy to this lifetime because that's the only way you get other people to come along with you. And when you do, you make the most amazing friends, people that you will know forever.

END TC: 01:16:10:00