

Interview details:

Date: August 5, 2022

Interviewer: Barbara Alvarez

Interviewee: Marilyn Montemayor

Transcription:

Barbara

You can say and spell your name?

Marilyn

Marilyn Montemayor. M-A-R-I-L-Y-N Montemayor
M-O-N-T-E-M-A-Y-O-R.

Barbara

So, Marilyn, can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your connection to being an elected official?

Marilyn

I grew up in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. I went to airline school in Minneapolis. Not that I knew what I was doing, but my parents signed me up and took me there.

And then Pan Am came to Minneapolis and recruited everybody that they possibly could because all these Midwestern young women and men worked hard and took us to various places, but mainly New York City. I was green. I knew nothing. But I worked for Pan Am in New York and then worked for Pan Am in Dallas and then met my husband in Dallas. We were married in Nuevo Laredo and he being of Hispanic, Waco, Texas, he said, "We're getting out of Texas.

We're moving to Wisconsin. It'll be safer for me." And sure enough, and that's how we came to Wisconsin in 1965. And we've been here ever since.

Barbara

Have you been in Sheboygan since then?

Marilyn

In Sheboygan, same house.

Barbara

And so when did you start getting involved in local politics?

Marilyn

When Juan Perez was an alderman and he asked me to run in my district. I knew nothing. I was completely green, but I ran and I won. And then he became mayor, and I won four terms of being alderman.

They were called alderman then, even though we were women. And then I was defeated by Darryl Carlson. Very nice man. After four terms, that was fine. I stayed on city committees for all these years. And six years ago, five years ago in my district, Roger Otten retired. He was 90 as our county supervisor, and nobody had put their name out, so I did.

I thought "Somebody should represent my district." and I was unopposed, that's the way to do it. And I won. And then I served one term, two years, and with Covid and Zoom meetings and all that, I learned a lot, but still not as much as I should have by any means, because we weren't live. And I did have great respect for many county board supervisors. They had a long history, and they really worked hard for the citizens of Sheboygan County.

And then it was time for reelection again. I was unopposed, thank heavens. That's always the easiest, even though I love putting up signs. Well, no, I didn't much love putting up signs, but it was kind of flattering to see my name. And I won again. And now I'm in my second term of county board supervisor. I'm on the Health and Human Services Committee and the Health Committee, which is Rocky Knoll. There's lots of committees, and I have attended a number of the meetings just to find out what's going on.

There is so much to the county. There is so much to the city. I've learned that the city employees and the alder people and the county employees and the supervisors handle a lot of things for the citizens roads, the garbage, the water, all sorts of things.

Barbara

And so when Juan Perez first approached you, what year was that?

Marilyn

I don't remember.

Barbara

Okay.

Marilyn

I don't remember.

Barbara

Yeah, go ahead.

Marilyn

I won four terms. Was it 2000? 2004? I don't know. I don't remember. I should know that, but I don't.

Barbara

And had you ever thought that you would ever run for office before?

Marilyn

No. No.

Barbara

So what would you say other than being asked, something else must have inspired you. What was the reason that you were like, "Okay, I'm going to do this?"

Marilyn

I wanted to learn how the city runs, and I did, very much so. I learned. And I became involved in national politics, too, campaigning for people and door knocking for people.

Barbara

And so what does it take to run a campaign now that you've done it several times?

Marilyn

Getting the signatures, enough signatures in order to get the name on the ballot, and then if a person is opposed, then it's maybe literature, left on people's doors, knock on doors, talk to people, signs, debates, things like that.

Barbara

And what have you learned so far about yourself and also about this community and running for office as well as being in office?

You mentioned you've learned so much. And what specifically have you learned?

Marilyn

How the mechanics of the city work and how the mechanics of the county work. For instance, one small little thing: the water department of Sheboygan. Joe Trueblood is the director there, and I talked to one of the employees at the water department I don't remember who, and he had come from either Kansas City or St. Louis, something like that. And he said that our water is almost laboratory pure.

He said "The intake from Lake Michigan is what we used to put out in Kansas City." We have fabulous water. Well, I knew we had nice water, but I didn't really understand how wonderful our water is. And our water is extremely valuable.

Barbara

Wow. What have you learned about yourself?

Marilyn

That I learned something almost every day and that I make mistakes every day, and so does everybody else.

And if they say they didn't, they just did.

Barbara

I like that. What would you say to other women who are interested in running for office or maybe are uncertain? If they'd like to run for office?

Marilyn

Go for it and try for it. And even if you're defeated, that's okay. Try again or not. I'm not very cognizant of when people are trying to insult me.

I oftentimes don't get it, which is probably good for running for office, and also that it's not effective. Their insult is not effective because I don't get it that they're insulting me. Just do it. I knew very little about how the city and the state, how the city and the county government works, but I jumped in, and usually the employees and the fellow aldermen and fellow county board supervisors are very helpful.

Barbara And what do you think is the future of women in politics?

Marilyn It will be more and more because women are, we play caretakers, I guess, because we give birth to babies and Mother Nature kicks in. Mother Nature really doesn't care about women. She wants babies. And so Mother Nature provides for this caring and this nurturing to kick in. And if the woman dies, well, so what? At least she's produced a baby. That's what Mother Nature says.

So I would guess women will do more and more and more.

Barbara So you see women more and more in politics?

Marilyn Yes.

Barbara On all levels of politics?

Marilyn I do. Okay. I do, yes.

Barbara And why do you think people should get involved on a local level?

Marilyn So they appreciate what the local government is doing for them. They would be amazed what the local government is doing for us.

I didn't comprehend the full scope of the city government and the county government. And it's roads, it's garbage, it's water, it's streetlights, it's ambulance, it's fire protection, it's all sorts of things. And in the county, there's more things I'm learning about that, because it's every place in the county, all the villages, all the townships, all the cities, and then wetlands and so forth, that I didn't comprehend that the county took care of all that.

And the airport and the airport. The Sheboygan County Airport now has customs— international customs. Isn't that wonderful?

Barbara I didn't know that.

Marilyn That's new. And it was initiated, I think, when they were going to have the big golf tournament. And also Kohler and maybe other companies also need to bring international people in regularly, and they would have to come through Chicago or Milwaukee.

But being able to fly directly to Sheboygan and go through customs here made it easier for them.

Barbara I see. What do you recommend for somebody wanting to get involved on a local level? What steps should they take? How can they start to get involved?

Marilyn Attend some meetings, because all the meetings are open to the public. All the county meetings, all the city meetings. Occasionally there's—not a secret meeting. I don't mean that.

Barbara A closed meeting?

Marilyn Closed meeting. That's the word. 99% of all meetings are open to the public to come and sit in and just listen to as many meetings as you can. And they're all published by the county or the city.

Barbara Well, thank you so much for telling me a little bit about what your journey has been like and the advice you have for other people, and especially women. Is there anything you'd like to add to this conversation?

Marilyn If there is, I don't know what it is now.

Barbara Okay, well, thank you so much, Marilyn.

Marilyn Sure.