

Interview details:

Date: July 19, 2022

Interviewer: Barbara Alvarez

Interviewee: Nanette Bulebosh

Transcription:

**Barbara:** So can you say your name?

**Nanette:** Nanette Bulebosh.

**Barbara:** And can you spell your first name?

**Nanette:** N as in Nancy. A. N, as in Nancy. E-T-T-E. Bulebosh. B as in boy. U-L-E. B as in boy O-S-H.

**Barbara:** Okay. And you might need to speak a little louder.

**Nanette:** Okay, sure.

**Barbara:** Okay, so, Nanette, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

**Nanette:** I've always been politically interested in politics. My very first career aspiration as a kid was to be the first woman president. Absolutely. Absolutely.

**Barbara:** Love It.

**Nanette:** What inspired me to do that must have been a book. Back then I was born in 1958, so back then books about women were hard to come by. But we had like a series of biographies. Lucretia Mott. But I remember what was life changing for me was reading my first issue of Ms. Magazine when I was 14. It came out 1972. I saw it. I still remember seeing it on newsstand, Piggly Wiggly or something. I picked it up, I had enough money and I read it.

I took it home and it was just different from anything I've read. I grew up I had two older sisters. One was very much a mentor in terms of having me read Seventeen Magazine, Teen magazine, all that. Not Cosmopolitan, but things for girls, beauty, American Teen, and then all the celebrity stuff. So you're getting this message about what kind of woman you want to grow up to be. And then all of a sudden Ms. Magazine was totally different. And that blew my mind.

**Barbara:**

Do you remember any article that stands out to you?

**Nanette:**

There's one I don't remember the author, but I think it was called "I Want a Wife." It was one of the very first issues I want to say Jane Riley, Jane O'Reilly wrote it. Very famous article. You can Google it probably in Wikipedia. "I Want a Wife" or "I Wish I Had a Wife" to do all these things that women do that are unpaid in a marriage.

And it was like that somebody was actually writing this down and putting words to it instead of... it was bringing it out into the light, bringing out all these expectations. And it was every woman that I knew. My mom had a job. She was one of two working women on the block. So the other mothers, my friend's mothers, were the ones who said, "Hey, summertime." This time of year. They're out there making lemonade and cookies for us.

And I thought that was pretty cool. But I really admired my mom and my friend's mom too, because she got dressed up every day. She had her own life. She was more independent. But anyway, so Ms. Magazine. So ever since then I was very interested in politics. I was high school newspaper editor. I had some really good friends. I went to a wonderful private school for two years, run by women. It was a matriarchal- it was a convent school. And that was also somehow feminist, even though the women were very anti choice.

The nuns. I remember arguing with them about it, but they let me argue about it. Not many other school environments would encourage that.

**Barbara:**

So did you always know then that you wanted to run for office at some point?

**Nanette:**

No. Well, that's true. I want to be president, but I had no idea how. But I must have been reading in Ms. Magazine about women running for office and how hard it was.

**Barbara:**

So when was it that you ultimately decided to run for office?

**Nanette:**

School board in the '90s, when my children were young. The guy I married, a farmer. I helped his campaign for assembly, and later he was on the town of Rhine board. But he ran for assembly against the incumbent. He didn't have a prayer. But it was such a fun experience. I think it was kind of devastating to him. But he did encourage me too. He had been on the school board. That's how I met him as a reporter. He was on the school board.

He was my subject. And then we dated. That was kind of a fun little romance there. I really admired his politics. I just liked his mind. So

he encouraged me to run for school board when my kids were young. They weren't even in school yet, but they had an opening, and that was fun. But that was local office.

**Barbara:** So what was the year that you officially...?

**Nanette:** 2016.

**Barbara:** 2016. So you first ran for office in 2016. So what was that experience like?

**Nanette:** It was absolutely wonderful. The very first day, someone said, "When you run for office, wonderful things happen." I told you this, I told everybody this. You may win, which is great, it's phenomenal, but you may not win. But wonderful things happen just by running. And she was absolutely right. I never forgot that. It was incredible. The people you meet, the energy you get after you're at some meeting where you get to work the room.

And again I'd watch Martha do it. By then, I'd watch several candidates do it. How you just learn how to listen to people. You learn how to look them in the eye, shake their hands, "Tell me, oh, I did that too." The things I do now as a server, it's the same thing, but it's real. And you get this energy from people. And the people who volunteered for my campaign, the ideas I feel like I'm talking too much. But anyway, it was a wonderful experience.

**Barbara:** So when did you decide to run again?

**Nanette:** Yeah, that was going to be it for sure. I don't remember. 2018.

**Barbara:** And can you clarify the positions that you ran for?

**Nanette:** State Assembly AD 27, Assembly District 27, which is the north side of Sheboygan, a little bit of Manitowoc County, the western part of Sheboygan County where I live: Elkhart Lake, Plymouth, Howards Grove, Kohler, and Elkhart Lake. All these townships. I did win in four districts in both races.

I think I did better the first time, but I can't remember. It was over 11,000 votes. Both times. I was happy for every vote. I was grateful.

**Barbara:** And what was the second time like after you'd already run a campaign?

**Nanette:**

Yeah. And I wasn't going to agree to do it, but I think I remembered how much fun it was, and somebody made me feel needed and oh, and I know a whole lot of volunteers just at the last minute, within one week, they got all the signatures for me. I got a lot myself, but other people did too.

So I had well over 300. I had like almost 500 that I submitted, and I was grateful for that. So that was like the incentive, okay, we're doing this. And Lisa Vihos. I hired a poet to be my campaign chair. It was the smartest thing I ever did. She was fabulous. Fabulous. She was so creative because she looked at it in a whole different way than other campaign people do.

She just had this emotional, compassionate kind of warmth and these creative ideas, and she'd get her friends out, and she kept me going too.

**Barbara:**

So what was your favorite thing about running a campaign?

**Nanette:**

People like Lisa, people who were so helpful and so generous with their time and their support.

**Barbara:**

What did you learn about yourself and the community from running for office?

**Nanette:**

The most important thing I learned about myself is how much I love being with people and talking to people about topics they're passionate about.

I love that energy that I get one-on-one and from being in a group of people when we're truly engaging and listening with each other, which isn't always the case, especially in some political circles where people love to hear themselves talk. But I guess it's true of all of us. But I really love listening to people's stories, for sure. And I didn't know that. I didn't appreciate that about myself. Now I do. So now I work for those kind of jobs where I can do that.

And yeah, that's the most important thing. And I learned that community is full of wonderful, wonderful people and that I should shed all my stereotypes about people in the other party or people of other political beliefs, because some of my best conversations really were with people from the other party. When I did find people at the doors and they were willing to talk, I had oh, my God, I had some wonderful experiences, mostly older, with some younger people, too.

The second campaign, when people answered the door, the big thing was pot among the young people. "Do you support legalization?" I said. "Yeah, damn right I do. My opponent does not." But that was really the number one issue among the young people I spoke to. But I loved hearing their stories.

**Barbara:** It sounds like you were able to have conversations with people across the aisle?

**Nanette:** Absolutely. Absolutely. Who were willing to just talk and share.

When they saw that I was really interested and wasn't just giving some line or spouting my speech or something or my buzzwords, that I really wanted to hear them, some people opened up, and I loved it.

**Barbara:** Was it scary for you the first time as a candidate to knock on a door or were you always ready to do it?

**Nanette:** I was always ready. Well, phone calls I don't like. I don't like not seeing the person on the other end who knows what they're doing, and you're always interrupting them.

We're not used to phone calls anymore. It's not like growing up with the princess phone in your bedroom. Is he going to call or not? No. It's usually a robocall or it's a political call and like, I'm busy now. And doors, they either answer or they don't. And usually they don't. They're home, but they don't want to talk to you. And that's okay. You respect that. Leave your literature. But if they do, they really want to talk. And how cool is that? It's so cool.

**Barbara:** So what would you say now that you've run for office twice? What would you say to other women who also want to run for office?

**Nanette:** It's absolutely worth it. You will learn more things about yourself. You will learn wonderful things about the community, the support you get. Just be willing to make a huge commitment of time, of resources. Make sure you surround yourself with people who will give you emotional support as well as financial support. Make sure your campaign, get a good campaign chair who knows what she's doing and has done this before, and it's going to keep you disciplined.

But also have somebody there who is there just for you. Like, "Nanette you got to go have a beer now" or whatever, who is going to realize that you don't have the energy or you need water or whatever. "Can I help you with that?" And there are people willing to do that. That's what's so cool. What else? Money. It helps if you got your own money. Otherwise it helps to know a lot of people with money because you can't run a campaign without it. It's depressing, but that's just how it is. Be open minded. Be open to learning.

And the adventure. It's an adventure. It's a journey. You may or may not win, but you're still going to win. I absolutely won so much so it's so worth it.

**Barbara:**

What do you feel like you won?

**Nanette:**

I won this knowledge about myself. I won new relationships that I'm still in touch with all these years later. My Emerge classmates, I'm still in touch with those I'm still friends with so many people I met along the way. And when I can offer a chance to help them, I'm very, very happy to do that.

Yeah. I won self confidence, for sure. Absolutely.

**Barbara:**

What would you say to a woman who is perhaps on the fence? Maybe they think they don't have enough experience or that they're not a great speaker. What would you say to anybody that's feeling doubtful about their ability?

**Nanette:**

Just remember, picture yourself as Mr. Smith instead of Miss Smith. Remember, they don't need seven people to call them to ask them to run.

They almost always have this inner confidence. Yeah, I never thought about it. I'll run. Whereas women somehow need to be convinced. So think about that. Don't wait for seven people, just do it. It's so worth it.

**Barbara:**

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

**Nanette:**

Because your voice needs to be heard. And the way we do it is through the local politics. That's how we feed into larger systems.

And because local politics, as you know, has a much more impact on your day-to-day life than what they're doing in Washington. For sure. And even Madison. Your town board is deciding your local taxes, your tax base, who's your assessor, who's going to evaluate your home the next time? They're choosing your septic systems, they're choosing the fire staff, the library staff. The school boards are choosing your curriculum and hiring the teachers and administrators, there are police commissioners run for that.

They're choosing who is going to get leadership positions in your police department. What are the requirements for the fire department that can women even compete? That's why it's important. Local level has far more impact and it teaches you so much. So I love my seven years on the school board. I loved my three years as a public library board member. I wasn't elected, but still was public service.

**Barbara:**

And is there anything else that you want to add to this conversation before we wrap it up?

**Nanette:**

No. I appreciate you hearing from me. I think you're going to get some really interesting answers from a lot of people. I'm glad you're getting people of all ages and from all different backgrounds. It's so important to have diversity of voices. We tend to speak in silos and we're not going to get anywhere if we don't figure out how to listen to people, even if they feel differently than we do.