

WOMEN'S INFORMATION SERVICE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Maureen Fallon

Interviewer: Liz Ahern

Interviewee: Maureen Fallon

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[00:00:08]

AHERN: This is an interview with Maureen Fallon on the 21st May in Twenty Eighteen. This interview is held in the State Library of South Australia and is part of the Women's History Project.

Thank you Maureen for coming would you like to give me your name and a brief overview of when and where you were born and grew up.

FALLON: Maureen Sandra Fallon is my name. I was born in Scotland and educated there until I was thirteen and then the rest of my schooling happened in Belfast in Northern Ireland and then I went to England to become a Librarian in Birmingham. And in nineteen-seventy having qualified and worked in Libraries in England I came to Adelaide and started work in the State Library in nineteen-seventy.

AHERN: Thank you. Okay so I know you were involved with the formation of the Women's Information Switchboard as it was in those days so that's the term I refer to use if that's alright with you. They call themselves Service now.

FALLON: Oh really.

AHERN: Yes the Switchboard disappeared over time. So can you give me some of the background and context of how you got involved with the Women's Information Switchboard?

FALLON: I'll try and make it relatively brief until we get to the really subject of the discussion. I was a Librarian and as happens with many women I was married I had a child and I wanted to continue working once the available six months leave was up and I was told at that time by the State Librarian that it was impossible to continue in a senior role on a part-time basis and that kind of social change would take twenty years to occur and it certainly wasn't up to him to institute it. I resigned feeling fairly devastated, my career was over, my identity was over simply because I wanted to be a good mother. A month later I had been discussing part-time employment with the Public Service Association and with various people around the place and so four weeks after I resigned from the State Library I was recruited as a part-time employee, which technically wasn't possible but some how or other we made it happen in the Women's --- the newly established the Women's Advisory Unit in the Premier's Department. So I worked there --- my job, the job that was given to me and the reason I was employed was to try and have permanent part-time employment introduced throughout the Public Service in South Australia. Through a great deal of wonderful work with many people that came about nine months later, which I thought was very significant in terms of a time lag.

[00:03:06]

In the process, however one of the arguments that we had used for the importance of part-time employment for women was that it allowed you to stay in the workforce and be seen and be noticed and develop your skills. So indeed after nine months working on the part-time employment project people in the policy division of Premier's Department had noticed my work, the Premier at the time Don Dunstan wanted to do something about the powerless state of the library and information services in South Australia and to cut a long story short I was employed full-time as the Executive Officer to a committee that was being established, the Library Services Planning

Committee. So I worked on that, managed that process if you like with the Chairman, Jim Crawford, who was also on the Libraries Board and a private business man and a very active participant and while we were doing that, it took place in the Premier's Department and I was still geographically very close to the Women's Information --- to the Women's Advisory Unit, in conversation with Andi Sebastian and Deborah McCulloch they talked about how they'd had this idea, Andi had had this idea of establishing a switchboard. She'd been to San Francisco at some stage to Haight Ashbury and she'd seen something like that and so they were talking about this fairly vague idea of a Women's Information Switchboard and being the very practical person that I am I would say well how are you going to do that; you know you haven't got any money, you haven't got any way of establishing it etc. etc. And I thought about it for a while and in the context of the Library Service's Planning Committee we had an allocation, I think it was twenty thousand dollars from memory, we had an allocation for a specific special project dealing with Information Services. And I thought to myself well, mmmm, these two are never going to get it together as an idea but if we were to link it to the provision of information services it would be perfectly appropriate to establish something like that. So I put it to my committee or rather the committee and talked of course at great length with Deborah and Andi and we worked extremely hard over quite a long period of time to translated their fairly radical ideas into a sort of a bureaucratically admissible and acceptable form which took a lot of work I might say but it was a good mix, a good mix of skills really between them and myself. And I then had to persuade my committee to accept that idea, and they did, which was wonderful it was really amazing.

[00:06:00]

And I must say for me personally the thing that really --- I've never forgotten about that was Andi's mantra at the time, the mission for the Women's

Information Switchboard was to take every women, every woman seriously and to listen, and I have adopted that in my own life ever since, not just for women but for everybody really that we all want to be heard and we all deserve to be heard and so the Women's Information Switchboard started from a very --- that premise was really vital and I hope to this day that it continues. It also --- it also had to work within a Government atmosphere ----

AHERN: Framework, yeah.

FALLON: And the framework and that required me to be quite firm in trying to persuade them really of how it might work and one of the things that we collectively decided upon very early in the piece and it was vital I think to it being successful was it would be apolitical and that we had to involve women from all walks of life and there would be women from the Labor side of things, women from the Liberal side of things, women from the Country Women's Association, women from city all ages, all types, all beliefs, whatever, and I think that was a large part of its success and I had to --- from my angle I had the job of trying to find a location for this service and so what we actually managed to do was take the old Institute Building on the corner of North Terrace and Kintore Avenue and there was a large room there and we managed to acquire the use of that ---

AHERN: There was two rooms really, the front room and the one behind was the meeting room.

FALLON: Really!

AHERN: There were two rooms there.

FALLON: Yeah, okay two rooms. I don't remember that. I mean I don't remember, I just remember the big ----

AHERN: It was a long time ago

FALLON: Yeah, that's right. But we certainly --- so I had to again convince the Library people --- we had quite a lot of leeway --- we were quite a powerful committee and we had the authority to make decision over and above the Library hierarchy and so it wasn't all that easy but we managed to get the space and get the support. I'm not sure we entirely got the support of the Head of the Library. We did get the support of many, many other people.

AHERN: You obviously charmed the Library's Board into it somehow.

FALLON: Yes indeed, yes indeed.

AHERN: So who was on the Library's Board back then, any, any idea?

FALLON: Oh my goodness.

AHERN: I just want

FALLON: Well Jim was the Chairman ---

AHERN: He was the Chair I can remember that.

FALLON: Of the Library's Board. He was a mover and a shaker. Tony Brown I think was on the Library's Board. He was a Librarian.

AHERN: That a familiar name.

FALLON: He was at the Institute of Technology. And who else was there, I can't remember.

AHERN: Well I'm just curious because I have a Library background, I'm just interested that's all.

FALLON: Yes such a long time ago.

AHERN: Yeah it is.

[00:09:10]

FALLON: I mean I did end up --- well I know that's a further story down the track really --- but I suppose we had enormous support from the Public Service Board as well. Mary Beasley was the Public Service Board Commissioner.

AHERN: Ah that's right yes.

FALLON: And so we did have a lot of high-level support. We had support from --- I mean the Women's Advisory Unit was responsible for some of that. I mean Deborah was amazing in getting those very senior men in the Public Service on side. They didn't necessarily believe it all but they kind of were intrigued by these wild women and there was some extraordinary social events when I remember the head of the Premier's Department and the Head of the Public Service Board and all these people, all these men singing you know liberty, fraternity you know up with the women, you know (Ahern laughs) I mean it was extraordinary times.

AHERN: It was amazing.

FALLON: And so Hedley Bachman I think was then in the Premier's Department, yeah.

AHERN: Oh yeah I remember the name, yeah.

FALLON: So we got everybody on side really and ---

AHERN: Well the time was right wasn't it ---?

FALLON: Well it was a, it was a good time but it was ---

AHERN: Yeah it was, you know it ---

FALLON: I think people might forget how hard it was ---

AHERN: It was the end of the seventies

FALLON: It was the end of the seventies

AHERN: It was --- you know had made some social changes and it was more ---

FALLON: I think we had Don Dunstan that was really important.

AHERN: And Don Dunstan was really important wasn't it.

FALLON: It was incredibly important

AHERN: Cos it was a time of change ---

FALLON: It was ---

AHERN: And trying to do something.

FALLON: Well I can tell you know that in terms of getting the part-time employment thing through the Public Service Board the Commissioner --- I kind of coopted myself onto the Equal Opportunities Board ---

AHERN: Oh yeah.

FALLON: Which was mainly the Public Service Board Commissioners and there was a marvellous man called Jack, Jack, can't remember his surname, he was a fabulous really old time bureaucrat and he was absolutely instrumental in actually making all of this work within the Public Service side of things, Public Service Board side of things and if hadn't been there I think we would have had a much more difficult situation and I would go to those Equal Opportunity Board meetings and I would hear those Commissioners, I remember David Mitchell was one and I can't remember the others, but they would say things like 'well my wife doesn't need to do this' 'I don't see why this is important' you know and they really had that view, it was incredible. And one of the shifts that happened, as you say things were changing, one of the things that happened, this went on for nearly a year, one of the shifts was when their wives decided they wanted to work and maybe get a little part-time job and

you could see that that was making a difference. So we did all the international studies, we wrote copious reports on you know all the experience around the world and statistics and everything else ---

AHERN: Permanent part-time work and yeah ---

FALLON: They always wanted more and more information. And ---

AHERN: Well a research Librarian they had the right person to do all that.

FALLON: Well in a way they did --- I mean oh Jack and I did --- we did this huge report on the whole thing. But fundamentally but it was prejudice that we were trying to work against really.

[00:12:16]

AHERN: Of course yeah.

FALLON: And in fact if you --- I don't know if it is appropriate really to list in this discussion but it's a really --- it might be important to people who might ever hear this because I think the idea still works. I got the part-time employment thing through, a little bit of devious luck, fortuitous circumstance, there was an election coming up and I suggested to the Premier that he would say he would introduce permanent part-time employment if they won the election and he said well he would do that if you know there was support for it so I established a community committee. So I brought people in from outside, we had people from SACOSS [South Australian Council of Social Services], people from all the women's areas ---

AHERN: Services, yep.

FALLON: and we had Premier's committee of non-bureaucrats you know advising us ---

AHERN: Advising, yep.

FALLON: I didn't know if this was a good idea or not. And we had the Public Service Board and we had the Superannuation Board.

AHERN: Oh yeah.

FALLON: Now the Public Service Board and the Public Service Association ---

AHERN: Okay.

FALLON: So the Public Service Association was getting a little bit of flack from me and others, so they said oh yeah well we'll support it. They didn't really want to support it but they said they would.

AHERN: Yeah.

FALLON: They certainly hadn't supported me when I was trying to get part-time work.

AHERN: (laugh) Well they weren't ever very --- no always

FALLON: But anyway, they said they would. The Public Service Board said because the Premier was pushing through us of course and so the Public Service Board said we will, we will introduce it but unfortunately the Superannuation Board can't deal with that and so unless the Super Board can do it we can't possibly introduce this. So we said really. So I wrote letters at the time, I had all these letters; I had the Premier write to the Super Board say do it. The Super Board said and do it and the Public Service Board will also do it. So the Super Board said okay well we can do it so we said to the Public Service Board well, the Super Board can do it so your main excuse has gone so they had no choice. The community was pushing the Premier and you know the politics of the situation and so we had --- and the Public Association had said they would do it but they didn't really think it was going to happen so fundamentally my, my advice to any young people or anyone coming after or

any kind of you know any hard fought community issue is there was five different players there and you had to kind of persuade ---

AHERN: All of them.

FALLON: All of them and none of them really wanted to do it but if thought everyone else was going to do it then they would do it and that's exactly what happened. That's exactly what happened.

AHERN: That's how you have to play them off each other, yeah.

FALLON: Yeah so we got permanent part-time work, which was really good.

[00:15:09]

AHERN: Yeah.

FALLON: And that is --- to me that was an excellent learning exercise you know for just how things happen. And you know it was extraordinary.

AHERN: And that experience must have been very helpful for you when you were trying to help Deborah and Andi get the Women's Information Service funded.

FALLON: Oh totally, absolutely, absolutely.

AHERN: Whose idea, do you remember where the idea of employing staff using an employment scheme, the NEAT scheme [National Employment and Training Scheme]

FALLON: The NEAT scheme

AHERN: or the RED Scheme [Regional Employment Development Scheme] or something, there was ---

FALLON: was it the CEP [Community Employment Program] or something

AHERN: CEP there was ---

FALLON: I can't remember, it was one of those ---

AHERN: They had one new funding with paid staff, I remember ---

FALLON: We did, we did and ---

AHERN: And there was a lovely diverse range of women chosen right back then ---

FALLON: There was

AHERN: in at the beginning

FALLON: And if you could find Ros, Rosalie

AHERN: Ros Johnson.

FALLON: Ros Johnson yeah. She was ---

AHERN: I don't know if --- she wasn't very well last time I heard about her.

FALLON: No I don't know.

AHERN: Carmel would know. I can ask what happened to Ros Johnson. I'll follow up because she would be really good to interview because she was the first Coordinator. I'll ask about Ros because I know some people who may know.

FALLON: Yeah and then Carmel of course.

AHERN: Well Carmel has been interviewed for this project. And I remember Carmel was often stereotyped as the Catholic mother of six.

FALLON: Absolutely she was ---

AHERN: And I was often stereotyped as the doctor's wife (laugh)

FALLON: Oh really.

AHERN: Yeah when we were doing one WIS ---

FALLON: I wonder what I was stereotyped as.

(Both laugh)

FALLON: I dread to think

AHERN: We use to use it as part of our sort of promotion that we weren't these wild rabid feminists that we were, although we were all those things, we were also these other stereotyped ---

FALLON: That's true and that was really important. In fact when the Women's Information Switchboard first started and we had these sort of opening events of various kinds we made sure we had the CWA ladies, we had the Liberal ladies, we had the Labor people, we had everybody and, and it was really amazing how everyone got on so well together because we all, we all needed the same things. You know ---

AHERN: Yes exactly because part of my role was to set up the support group.

FALLON: Yeah, all right yeah.

AHERN: Betty Fisher.

FALLON: Betty Fisher, oh Betty Fisher.

AHERN: Betty Fisher was a force to be reckoned with our Betty Fisher ---

FALLON: Oh she was wonderful, she was wonderful.

AHERN: And because I was involved in WEL [Women's Electoral Lobby] at the time and ---

FALLON: Julie Ellis, you must have known Julie Ellis no?

AHERN: I knew her, I sort of knew and Joan Russell I had the most to do with in those days but Betty Fisher pushed and shoved me and told me that I need to run this Support Group because this organisation would never survive if it didn't have the support of all those the Catholics and the Liberal women and the Labor women and all those different groups and it was my job to organise meetings, get them to come in every month to get an update on the service and what it was doing and send out little newsletters and all those sort of things.

[00:18:07]

FALLON: Well there was a lot of work went into maintaining that support for the service ---

AHERN: Absolutely

FALLON: Because I must say ---

AHERN: And it still has kept it going ---

FALLON: Right.

AHERN: That's why some of the other women's information services interstate have gone because they didn't have that support and this one it still --- up until the last two or three years they have had support group meetings. Still all those years a lovely woman called Felicity Lord, Fliss ran the support group for about the last ten or fifteen years that I know of and kept everybody on side. And when at one stage the Government wanted to cut the Service all these letters suddenly came pouring in.

FALLON: Well actually Governments wanted to cut the Service almost from the beginning really and we had to keep, every time there was any hint of an election or any change we, we really had to keep these meeting going where everybody came together and went no this is important we need to have it

and I mean it was under threat constantly really and it probably still is you know.

AHERN: And, and Tonkin [David Tonkin Premier of South Australia 1979-1982]

FALLON: But one of the things --- and Tonkin

AHERN: Tonkin's the one who gave them permanent positions ---

FALLON: Yeah, yeah.

AHERN: Because he'd just taken over.

FALLON: I remember that. I wouldn't mind putting in a comment here when you say that the services in the other States didn't last.

AHERN: Some of them haven't.

FALLON: Yeah, what I --- a few years later, this is a lot of water that went under the bridge, but a few years later I was working in Victoria and at a pretty senior level and the --- some of the women had started WIRE [Women's Information Referral Exchange] I think they called it there.

AHERN: That's right WIRE, yeah.

FALLON: And one of the things I would say in a broad sense which I've always said to anyone who'll ever listen about the difference between South Australia and the Eastern States or other States, is that in South Australia when we want something to happen everybody gets together and cooperates so whether its the community its this political party, that political party it doesn't matter you know one particular religious group another --- we all --- if we want something to happen we all kind of get together and do it.

AHERN: And co-operate yeah.

FALLON: But in the Eastern States I must say when I went to work there I observed and I think its still true really, its dog eat dog in a really serious way and they don't actually --- they'd rather have a fight than actually make something happen. Whereas here I think we might have our differences but we actually would rather have --- make something happen. So ---

AHERN: And that was the lovely thing about WIS you had the women from Women's Liberation ---

FALLON: Yeah.

AHERN: You had the Lesbian women; you had all different groups of every different possibility all working together for the same purpose.

FALLON: It was ---

AHERN: It was really wonderful

FALLON: It was wonderful, it really was wonderful.

[00:20:55]

AHERN: Really old women in their seventies and eighties and women who were in their twenties and students it was just a wonderful range.

FALLON: And some of those older women, I remember, I mean I was young at the time, I mean I was early thirties at the time I suppose and actually to my shame I'll tell you this anecdote for the --- I shouldn't because it's not --- it doesn't set a good light. But when I went to work in the Women's Unit I have to say that I wouldn't have called myself a feminist and I remember --- I, I had been heard to say in the Women's Unit 'oh look I don't know why it needs to be like this, men and women we are all the same you know why don't we all just sort of get on with it and whatever'. Mea culpa, mea culpa, my god you know. (Both Laughed) It changed. But you know that's how I came into it

really. And the other good thing about how I came into my job and subsequent job in terms of the planning committee and whatever, what I --- I was never very fond of Don Dunstan in those days, we'd come from England after a very disastrous Labor Government, Harold Wilson ---

AHERN: Oh yes I remember that.

FALLON: And the pound in your pocket will not be devalued (loud noise) and it was the next day. So you know I wasn't really a dyed in the wool ---

AHERN: Labor supporter.

FALLON: Yeah and what I loved about being employed in the Premier's Department was that no one asked me how I voted. No one asked me ---

AHERN: No one cared.

FALLON: It didn't matter. What mattered was the issue and your merit and your competence ---

AHERN: And the work you did.

FALLON: Yeah and then of course, as I did work in the Dunstan Government for quite some time I just --- and subsequently I have to say, I mean my opinion of that man just went up and up and up and up because he had a vision and he had principles and he wanted to see things done.

AHERN: And he wasn't --- he was prepared to you know let things --- experiments happen.

FALLON: Abso..... oh god some of them I remember. I think when he established the alternative lifestyles committee the Premier's Department thought he had gone a bit far really because (laughter).

AHERN: And what were they looking into ---

FALLON: You know it just seemed like a contradiction in terms you know. They had Jim Cairns chairing it, I mean it was a hoot, it was a hoot and of course he'd been up in northern New South Wales ---

AHERN: Oh that was the --- I was probably thinking ---

FALLON: Which is where I've just come from actually. You know when he and I --- we went --- when I went to Victoria I was Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Employment and Training after the State Library here debacle --- he came across to Victoria too as Director of Tourism. So we'd find ourselves at the same ---

AHERN: Meetings.

FALLON: Meetings and things and then of course he'd been up in far north Queensland and I had a place up in far north Queensland so there was this --- it was not that we knew each other particularly you know, but ---

AHERN: Just moved in --- parallel circles, yeah

FALLON: We just moved in similar circles you know. It was quite funny. But I, I think he was a real visionary. Unfortunately the person who came after him without going into any great detail, although he was a good man, I'm sure, I got sick of the refrain 'this is no longer the Dunstan Government, this is not how it is'.

[00:24:02]

AHERN: Oh yeah, yeah.

FALLON: And so you weren't --- all of that stuff went out the window really, all that kind of --- you know ---

AHERN: We did manage to get ongoing funding for the Service and it kept ongoing which was fairly extraordinary really and without the support of the Liberal women I don't think it would have happen. In you know --- Helen Storrier was one of the names that I remember from way back then.

FALLON: Yeah.

AHERN: She was --- she would seemed to be the Switchboard representative, she use to come to all the meetings and she was the women on the Liberal Party Council or whatever it was. I don't know who must have been trying to battle --- there's still entrenched issues they have in that party ---

FALLON: Well I remember again --- this is jumping forward a little bit but of course when the Government changed in seventy-nine from Labor to Liberal, Murray Hill was --- it went from John Bannon to Murray Hill and Di Laidlaw was his assistant and they wouldn't even listen to anything I might say for about eighteen months probably, you know --- it just --- you were seen as a Labor person. But I have always said since and again this is heretical so (laugh)

AHERN: That's all right you can be heretical.

FALLON: But anyway this is history, it's old history ---

AHERN: It's History, yeah

FALLON: But I always said I got more --- the Labor people wrote much better submissions about things, thought through you know much more cautious, whatever. The Libs didn't seem to care about whether you wrote --- and it made much sense or not you know, but they would make decisions. And so I always said I got more Labor Party policy though the Government under the Liberals than I ever did under Labor, which is interesting.

AHERN: Interesting.

FALLON: Very interesting

AHERN: But Diana Laidlaw ended up becoming a great supporter of WIS anyhow over time. She and Jennifer Cashmore and who else was there, Jennifer Adamson, Cashmore, I think she changed her name half way through. And there were a couple of other Liberal women at that time. I still see them around time occasionally at Arts type things and I've seen Jennifer Cashmore and Diana Laidlaw Liberal --- and Anne Levy .

FALLON: Anne Levy, I was just going to say Anne Levy, yeah.

AHERN: And Anne Levy all sitting and chatting away about the old days and you ---

FALLON: And Susan Lenehan

AHERN: Susan Lenehan and there's another woman whose name escapes me. Who is a mate of Susan Lenehan. I see all that group of those senior politicians from way back then,

FALLON: I think we were all --- I think it was the time ---

AHERN: Everybody really did cooperate and they seemed to be they'd had their political stances but they could cooperate and collaborate, which is really lovely.

FALLON: Which it was, it is --- it was and is.

AHERN: Its not what happened to Julia Gillard, I don't think, but it's hard that's different time I guess, but ---

FALLON: Different times, yeah.

AHERN: But that was, that was impressive, my memory of how they all cooperated.

FALLON: Yeah, yeah.

AHERN: And you know they all seem to get on quite well when you see them socially out and about. You know they wouldn't know who I am but I just recognise all the faces because being an ex-teacher I'm very good on faces and names. I keep --- I can recognise people. Anyway, so ---

FALLON: So.

AHERN: Let see where we got to.

[00:27:20]

FALLON: Well we've just got to the establishment of it I think.

AHERN: We got to the establishment and let's talk about what --- how it was setup in terms of how it was decided that we work nine to nine-thirty seven days a week, have paid staff and volunteers. Can you remember how that all happened?

FALLON: Well not really. [Note from Maureen Fallon: 9-9.30pm, seven days a week were the opening hours of the library, and WIS followed suit]

AHERN: Was that Andi, more Andi?

FALLON: Well I think we all knew that women's issues don't just deal nine to five.

AHERN: That's right. They do now.

FALLON: Do they, that's sad. That's sad. And also I must say being a little bit equivocal about the paid staff routine and that --- I remember quite some years later and I don't remember how many years later, but there was a time when it seems the staff were a bit more interested in their pay structures and hierarchies than they were in actually providing the service. I was sad about that.

AHERN: That that happened from time to time. Depended on the individuals from my experience because having been both a paid staff member and a volunteer it really vacillated and the attitude towards volunteers in my experience changed --- it depended on who, who you were working with really. So of them were definitely focused about themselves and some of them had a much broader approach.

FALLON: The other thing about the volunteers, was you needed volunteers because the range of women's issues and the things that happened to women go right across the spectrum so you needed lawyers, you need needed doctors and you needed all sorts of different people who could actually, you know people from housing you know all sorts of --- childcare ---

AHERN: You needed contacts, networks.

FALLON: You needed, you needed really good networks and that was one of the things that the Women's Information Switchboard did brilliantly was to actually have those networks. And so you --- people could use them, you could ring up and have a problem with either custody battles or health or whatever and you could actually be referred usefully through the system, not just be given a phone number but actually, oh I suggest you ring so and so ---

AHERN: This is the person you've talked too, yeah.

FALLON: Yeah, and

AHERN: Yeah that person that personal referral was really important

FALLON: It was great and I think actually the Switchboard because it was so good at networking and brought people together that actually helped that process you know.

AHERN: I think true.

FALLON: I think that's really important and it wasn't about just getting people to work for free it was about sharing --- it was equally useful I'm sure for all the people who were volunteering. Because they themselves were all in networks ---

AHERN: Some of us learnt a lot I was totally educated by the Women's Information Service. I mean I already was, I was a card carrying feminist running parts of Women's Electoral Lobby and march in the streets and doing all sorts of thing, but I wasn't in --- part of the Women's Liberation Group I was more on the other, other side of it but --- and more on the conservative side I suppose you could say. But that was part of the joy for me I met and work with people like Jo Willmot, first Aboriginal worker, who really sorted me out and gave me lots of education about Aboriginal people and accused me of 'that's a very racist remark' and I'd say 'oh was it' I didn't mean to be and she educated me and the same with those multicultural workers, the Luisa Sheenans, the Nicky Dimitropoulos ---

FALLON: Yeah I remember Nicky

AHERN: And all those different women ---

FALLON: Different women, yeah

AHERN: Really educated me about ---

FALLON: And it would have been great for them to meet all of you. You know all the different people coming together.

[00:30:53]

AHERN: We all --- we had some amazing camp ---

FALLON: You know my ---

AHERN: Did you ---

FALLON: Sorry.

AHERN: It's all right

FALLON: I was just going to say that was --- it started in seventy-nine --- I was still involved in Library and Information Services so we --- CISSA was another one of my ideas --- babies ---

AHERN: Babies --- can you explain CISSA

FALLON: It was the Community Information Services of South Australia.

AHERN: Information Services, that's right.

FALLON: And that proved to be --- that was set up under SACOSS [South Australian Council of Social Services] and proved to be a really useful exercise as well. And by this stage I was also running the State Library, reorganising it. The Mortlock Library came through me the Public Records Office, you know the Adelaide Lending Service all sorts of stuff, you know, whatever, but why am I telling you this, there is a reason. Yeah, because of course I was also involved in the awful, drastic terrible situation of being nominated to the --- having run the State Library for eighteen months and the way it was structured was very unfair in the beginning, which I was devastated about. I was the obvious person to, to be the State Library, the new State Librarian (cough) but my boss said basically we can't appoint you, you know to that job, we're going to remove the State Librarian, but we can't appoint you and I said 'what do you mean', like I've been doing it for ---

AHERN: Yeah, that's right ---

FALLON: you know, I've been doing all the stuff for now three years or something. And he said oh look 'too political' and I went what is he talking about that's ridiculous, you know, I mean it's crazy and he no, no, no so what

I'll do is we'll give the title and the money to the guy running the Public Libraries who we'd appointed, we'd appointed I'd written the bloody letter to say how good he was when he came from Victoria and you can actually run the State Library and I will write in writing, I will --- I'll put something in writing to him and to you saying he is not to interfere in the running of the State Library. So you will be the acting Deputy State Librarian and he'll be the acting State Librarian but in name only. I went that's unjust ---

[00:33:03]

AHERN: Yeah it is, totally unfair

FALLON: It's unbelievably unjust and do you know nearly all my friends and family said, Maureen why are you so uptight about it I mean you know I can --- Deputy State Librarian is a really good job, you know why are you so --- I'm going cos it's not fair, it's not right. So fundamentally what I did then over the eighteen months was to restructure and do the State, redo the State Library, we had the wonderful binding exhibition all the way down the foyer, which twenty-seven thousand people saw in three weeks and oh it was amazing what we did. We did the Mortlock Library, we did all sorts of stuff and I was really busy working with the people in the State Library and then eighteen months down the track as he had said the job will be advertised, you will have been doing it, you know there will be no issue then. The job was advertised, I applied, all the men in the Public Service as well as the guy in charge of the Public Libraries applied and the committee, the selection committee was the Warren Horton, who became the National Librarian, head of the --- Mary Beasley, Public Service Board Commissioner, Jim Crawford, somebody else and, and a staff representative, Bev Witton, I think her name was. Anyway it was a very high-powered ---

AHERN: Bev, Bev Witton.

FALLON: Bev Witton, that's right. It was a very high powered committee, selection committee and I was the unanimous choice, but nothing happened. Instead of the nomination coming through, nothing happened, and nothing happened and nothing happened and a couple of weeks passed, I mean usually they do it the next day almost and it got to the point where the Premier, who was John Bannon by that stage, got furious and he basically rang the Public Service Board Commissioner and said get down here to Parliament House to my office, what's going on, why have you not made this nomination. So they made the nomination and then they leaked a little bit to The Advertiser. So in The Advertiser the next day it said 'Ms Maureen Fallons' been nominated to for position of State Librarian the Public Service Board believe it has been advertised widely enough and expect a number of appeals. So need less to say everyone who applied, appealed.

AHERN: Mmmm they would.

FALLON: Now a couple of the guys dropped out but then there was, I think there was three of them, Ewan Millar, and a couple of other guys who'd been -- one was in the Education Department and one was somewhere else and so then there was another six months before the appeal was heard and I was busy, I was running the place and I just though truth will out, I mean its --- blind Freddie can see what's happening here, you know ---

AHERN: I'm doing it.

FALLON: So I didn't actually bother I just thought, tell the truth you know, tell what I've done. Went into this --- I don't know if is --- it's interesting women's stuff ---

AHERN: Yeah it is.

FALLON: Went into the appeal hearing, it was a two-day hearing, and you know I was quite relaxed. I know Warren Horton had offered to be a witness, a referee, and so had Jim Crawford and the Public Service Board guys had actually advised me that's not how it's done. We don't have witnesses at appeals and you don't need it, it's fine, it will be okay so I said no don't bother. So I was just in there by myself, the committee was an agricultural biologist, a lawyer and an accountant, all men ---

AHERN: Oh my goodness, yeah

[00:36:18]

FALLON: And the agriculture guy was well known for believing that the female was definitely inferior to the male. So I didn't have much of a hope in hell really and it went really badly and really the crunch came --- I've never forgiven Ian McPhail for this --- he and I were - we'd worked together now nearly five years ---

AHERN: Oh you would have worked for years ---

FALLON: For five years, you know, and at one point --- so Ewan Millar got up and he said well I've been the acting State Librarian and we have reorganised the State Library and we've done the Mortlock, we've done this we've done that, all the things I'd done ---

AHERN: He'd claimed it all.

FALLON: He'd claimed it all and he could because he was the acting State Librarian right.

AHERN: Oh no.

FALLON: And I'm sitting there with my mouth --- going what (laugh).

AHERN: And who practically did it all.

FALLON: And then he said and what's more he said here is a letter that I was given when I was appointed to the position. Of course it said you're wonderful, you're fabulous, I'd written it myself I think you know it's what McPhail had sent and he said I have never been advised otherwise that I'm doing any other a perfect job and the Judge the guy who was the, the Chairman he turned to McPhail and said 'is that so Dr McPhail. And I never forget looking at McPhail's face and I thought yeah you bastard. Because if he'd said it's not true and I haven't told him, I haven't been a good manager myself he was stuffed and so he said 'that's true' and I --- that was it really. So anyway at the end of the appeal process nothing was heard again, nothing was heard again for weeks.

AHERN: It takes months ---

FALLON: And Anne Levy and all --- the women were up in --- this is a women's issue you know the women were up in arms and questions were being asked all over the place. Then eventually the answer, eventually the answer came down and the Premier got the result, which was Ewan Millar. I lost the appeal and Bannon was not impressed with that, to his credit.

AHERN: Because he knew who'd done all the work?

FALLON: He knew of course he did, yeah. And so he took it to Cabinet, no he went to the Governor, first, to say look do I have to appoint this guy, you know, really or you know is this kosher kind of thing, is this legal and the Government, I'm a bit hazy here ---

AHERN: Who was the Governor?

FALLON: I can't remember actually, I can't remember.

AHERN: Yeah I was just trying to think way back ---

FALLON: The advice was basically, it's possible, to not appoint him. That was the main thing, I mean I'd be gone really but you know it was possible not to appoint him. And remember under Dunstan --- this was five years of social change, so then Bannon took it to Cabinet and said basically look this is the situation, you know and Cabinet, a Labor Cabinet said it's more important, we fought for years for the appeals system, it's more important to support that than it is to worry about the State Library, because there was none of them who knew about the bloody State Library did they.

AHERN: No they wouldn't .

FALLON: So five years of social change just poof!

AHERN: Thrown in.

FALLON: Absolutely came to an end and I left the next day. I walked out and I've never been back in until this morning.

AHERN: Yes well.

[00:39:24]

FALLON: And fundamentally the day I left which was in a hurry --- I'm getting to why this is relevant to WIS actually --- but the day I left the guys in the Bindery who were absolutely devastated because I'd changed their working lives dramatically. They, they hastily got a book of Baudin's Journals and they bound it in red leather, red and gold leather and they didn't have time to do anything other than it ---literally it was a rush job --- inside they wrote 'thanks for the fresh air'. I've still got that, it's beautiful.

AHERN: Oh how lovely.

FALLON: But I was devastated to leave those guys because they really --- they were amazing.

AHERN: Amazing.

FALLON: The reason I'm sort of mentioning it I suppose is that what happened after that --- I left Adelaide, shortly after --- I was being considered for the Director of the Museum within the --- I had twelve months of being like the walking dead of you know. I mean nobody would talk to me. Like I'd been mates with you know Bannon --- not mates but you know I knew them well and knew Jeff Anderson and whatever and they couldn't look me in the face, you know it was terrible really. And McPhail made sure that I still got paid a reasonable amount and I set up the Public Records Office in that time and CISSA actually, that's what happened.

AHERN: Oh right and CISSA--- that's when the CISSA got set up

FALLON: So that's what happened. But I was being considered for the Director of the Museum's job when I got head hunted to Victoria and I think I owe Deborah a thank you for that. They wanted to --- so they appointed me --- I went over for lunch, thirty-fifth floor of the Rialto Building in you know ---

AHERN: Oh how charming, yeah.

FALLON: And got the job. And I was the second most senior woman in the Victorian Public Service for about 5 minutes. Then others came of course. So my job was Assistant Director General Ministry of Employment and Training, which was a better job than the State Librarian's job here. And I had a small child, my daughter was six, seven and I just thought I owe it to all the people who've stood by me and supported me in the Library and wherever I think I have to take this, it's a two year appointment and I spoke with my ex-husband, we were getting on alright and we'd shared the upbringing of our daughter and we worked out that if she flew over to --- if I flew her over to Melbourne every other weekend and I came back here in the meantime and all school

holidays and you know it would all be fifty fifty more or less, he'd do the Monday to Friday stuff and so that's what actually happened. And off I went and that was it really as far as --- well then the story gets more interesting in various ways but you know. So what I am really getting to and I'm sorry to have been so long winded about it but the day I left my goodbye to South Australia was in the Women's Information Switchboard in nineteen eighty three and everybody was there, you know everybody was there ---

AHERN: I wouldn't have been, I was overseas then.

FALLON: Were you.

AHERN: Yeah, yeah.

FALLON: Oh it was, it was a party and a half I tell you. Carmel was there ---

AHERN: We had some good parties in there.

FALLON: at the time, she was running the place at the time. Jim Crawford was there you know, Anne Levy, whoever, whatever. It was a really good send off it was fabulous but I mean it was heartbreaking, it was heartbreaking all that work to have been done any you ---

AHERN: Well you can still look around and see what great things have happened.

FALLON: Oh yeah. Look, look well one of the things that happened which --- what was happening to me had been looked at by women all over the country and also Warren Horton being a very powerful person as the you know National Librarian ---

AHERN: Chief Librarian, yeah.

[00:43:00]

FALLON: Basically, what happened after I lost the job is that women started to be appointed as State Librarians all over the country. So Pixie Crook in Sydney.

AHERN: Oh yes.

FALLON: Can't remember who it was in Victoria, Victoria, it just it you know it changed ---

AHERN: It changed.

FALLON: It changed things yeah. So you know that's the story that's what happens with women really.

AHERN: Yeah well you know ---

FALLON: But all I ever wanted to be all my life was a Librarian ---

AHERN: Yeah I know, it's amazing ---

FALLON: And ah ---

AHERN: Well that was me too, that was going to be my career trajectory and I went off on a different paths really.

FALLON: Well I must say I don't regret any of it really. One of the things I was invited to do so it must have been before I left here, or maybe I was invited to come back cos I must have been in Victoria at the time or something. Oh I came back as the Director of the Social Justice Strategy in eighty --- some years later in eighty-seven. So I was back in the Premier's Department as a Director.

AHERN: Right, okay.

FALLON: And I remember being asked to give a speech to the annual group of graduates coming out of the Institute of Technology I think it was ---

AHERN: Oh yeah.

FALLON: It was the Library and Information Services or something or other.

AHERN: Yeah, whatever it was called by then, yeah.

FALLON: And I gave this little talk and I and I --- this is also something that is good for people to hear if they should ever (laugh) want to hear any of this stuff, but fundamentally, I explained to them. I said look all I ever wanted to do was to be a Librarian but you know in life it's not quite like that, it's not sort of linear. And if you go up --- if you stay in the same groove and you'll go up very slowly a year at a time if you're lucky, bit by bit by bit it's a long process. I found that by sometimes by being forced rather than choosing, sometimes choosing to take a sideways shuffle into a completely different area you can come back up here, you can actually jump lots of steps and if you keep doing that it makes you a more rounded person and in the end you've got more to offer really, you know. And at the time it might feel absolutely devastating but actually all change is good. So my advice ---

AHERN: And you learn, you learn ---

FALLON: My advice to young ones is you know just take the opportunities that come along and sometimes they're forced on you rather than chosen you know. But I don't regret a thing, I think it's been, I've been very fortunate to have had a lot of different experiences and it's worked.

AHERN: Yes it's been great. So I'm just trying to --- did you actually spend much time at WIS observing what was going on, where you ---

FALLON: I did actually, yeah, because ---

AHERN: So can you talk about what your observations from those very early days, because I think that would be useful?

FALLON: Well I would say --- I would --- remember I was in --- I was running the State Library for you know a couple of years really and WIS was next door. In fact I was on the Board I think or something like that, I mean ---

AHERN: Some Management Committee I think.

FALLON: Yes it was a Management Committee.

AHERN: Or was it a Collective, I can't remember (Laugh).

FALLON: No it was a Management Committee, it was a Management Committee, that's right.

AHERN: I think the workers were called The Collective, we had a Collective ---

FALLON: Yes I think that's right.

AHERN: We had a Collective I think there was a Management Committee that the Collective reported to.

[00:46:08]

FALLON: And I went to those meetings regularly, every month or whatever it was and we would sit in the office about half a dozen of us and we would actually make things happen. I mean we --- it was good because I --- there were other people besides me but in our respective roles we were in a position to actually help WIS.

AHERN: Absolutely.

FALLON: So in different ways we, you know I would say well hang on a minute you know, how about this and how about that and you move..... whatever, blah, blah, blah. So I was quite involved, kept quite a close eye on it. They'd come and talk to me too if they had issues or whatever and so of it I would say it was welcoming, it was a welcoming place, it was so alive, it was really people were dedicated, they were dedicated and I mean as women nearly everyone

involved had been through some range of problems that women have throughout their lives and so I found it a very, very exciting, dedicated wonderful place and a bit irreverent, which was great. (Laugh).

AHERN: Yeah, that's right. It wasn't part of the bureaucratic mainstream.

FALLON: And I think if anything I would imagine it's probably become more bureaucratic. I hope it hasn't, but I ---

AHERN: I don't know, I don't work there ---

FALLON: Yeah.

AHERN: So I can't say. I know there's been various incarnations. At one stage they moved to the Railway Arcade. You know that Arcade ---

FALLON: Oh yeah, yeah.

AHERN: And that was good I believe from the people I have spoken to and interviewed. They said that was good cos lots of people dropped in then ---

FALLON: Absolutely.

AHERN: Because they'd be walking along and think 'what's a women's information service, what can I ask there' and ---

FALLON: And also a lot of people who need that information are likely to be using the trains and you know the buses and whatever.

AHERN: And now it's up in Grenfell Street, just near Consumer Affairs and along there opposite --- a bit further along near the traffic lights near the Adelaide Arcade and the Regent Arcade. It's up there except on the other side of the road.

FALLON: Is it on the ground floor.

AHERN: Yeah, it's on the ground floor and you have an invitation to visit if you'd like to ---

FALLON: Oh do I, how nice I'd like to.

AHERN: Yes you do if you would like to come.

FALLON: Id' love to.

AHERN: I'll be walking up there afterwards I've got to drop in all this stuff, but we're supposed to have done our --- we're meant to have done a pre-interview before the interview but I've been skipping the pre-interview cos I figure we can just you know ---

FALLON: Absolutely.

AHERN: Sign all the forms and do it all in the one day, to be honest.

FALLON: Absolutely, yeah.

AHERN: Because when we are all busy I figured a pre-interview wasn't really necessary. So but you are invited ---

FALLON: Look ah that's very nice.

AHERN: and there will be some sort of function in July.

FALLON: July.

AHERN: I believe that's the plan, what that function will be I don't know.

FALLON: Well if you --- if I can be advised of date as soon as you've got one.

AHERN: Yeah, I will make sure.

FALLON: Cos I do travel a fair bit and ---

AHERN: As soon as I know. At the moment they're talking --- I think --- cos I've interviewed a few other people said exactly the same thing. And some said around the eleventh of July is --- they're waiting for the Minister to confirm the date. I can't tell you who the Minister is I haven't quite got to that but I will apparently meet the new Minister on Wednesday ---

[00:49:37]

FALLON: Oh yeah of course ---

AHERN: There's a volunteer morning tea for volunteers at WIS so I will get to find out who the ---

FALLON: Oh that's good, so they're still --- you see ---

AHERN: So they're still --- well the new Minister coming so and that's very important that they get to know all about it and I'm not sure who that is yet, but I will do my best to ---

FALLON: And people like Frances Bedford they're doing a good job too, she's---

AHERN: Oh she's a great woman.

FALLON: She's a great woman. Just heard her on the news on the way in, what is it that she's doing, it's something ---

AHERN: Well she's been very involved with the Muriel Matters ---

FALLON: Yes she has

AHERN: Society, which is great.

FALLON: But there's something she's actually, she's actually raising as a private member's bill ---

AHERN: And she stood as an independent didn't she, yeah she stood as an independent and has done very well.

FALLON: She's been good.

AHERN: She's held on to her principles ---

FALLON: Yes.

AHERN: When they were pushing her in different directions.

FALLON: Yes indeed.

AHERN: And they were trying to kick her out so some of those younger union men could get in and get their opportunity.

FALLON: You know the more things change the more the more they stay the same really.

AHERN: Oh nothing like valuing women's contribution is it.

FALLON: Yeah, yeah. I ---

AHERN: I feel a bit sad about Steph Keys for the same reason, because she did a great job, Steph. But she was sort of elbowed out a bit too I think.

FALLON: Oh look there are stories, my god.

AHERN: A lot of things have happened to women over time in political parties.

FALLON: They certainly have.

AHERN: It's not always easy.

FALLON: Sometimes they try and send you mad or at least.

AHERN: Well let me see what other issues. So I guess we've talked about the Support Group and how important it was and the kinds of --- do you know anything about the phone ins and things that were held during the eighties.

FALLON: The eighties I wasn't there, well up until eighty-three.

AHERN: Yeah, so you were - so we had phone ins on domestic violence, women and housing, parental stress, women and disability, family law all those things.

FALLON: I can't say I can add much to that.

AHERN: You don't remember any of those, okay.

FALLON: I remember things happening, but I don't, I don't really recall.

AHERN: Okay I think that's --- are there other things that you think we need to talk about in terms of the --- your involvement at the very beginning of Switchboard. Because for me as somebody who was there at the beginning I was very aware of your name, I knew you were part of the Library and I knew that you were somebody that WIS turned to, because I was often the volunteer representative on the Collective, so I was really involved back then even though I've been out of it for quite a long time.

FALLON: I know what you mean, so well I'm sure.

AHERN: So ---

FALLON: But yeah I had the --- I was the kind of you know I was the type of bureaucrat ---

AHERN: The go to ---

FALLON: The go to bureaucrat that could actually you know ---

AHERN: this is how you manage this circumstance, yeah.

[00:52:22]

FALLON: Yeah and I mean sometime some of the ideas were a little bit crazy and you had to kind of say well look if you were just to think about doing it

that way you'd be more likely to get this kind of help or that kind of help, you know. So we each try to play our role.

AHERN: So that's right practical advice is really good.

FALLON: Practical advice. And I might say the Library was --- it was a good location for it initially, you know it absolutely was.

AHERN: It was. I look back now and think the occupational health and safety issues of that building when we were there on our own on weekends and nights completely we use to structure our shifts so that often there was just one person there till nine-thirty at night. And now I think back and I think that would never be allowed to happen now and luckily we all managed the circumstances. But I remember walking out a domestic violence man who came in looking for his wife and blaming me for her going to a shelter that day and I just kept invading his personal space until he kept stepping backwards til the end I said 'oh thank you so much for coming in' and locked the door. (Both laugh). But you know I think about it now and I think how dangerous was that but we were a bit naive in some of those sort of ---

FALLON: Absolutely, I think ---

AHERN: Structures. We hadn't heard --- thought about occupational health and safety and certainly for a lot of us we didn't understand superannuation.

FALLON: Yes.

AHERN: And I was temporary for years and I really didn't think I should --- I'm not going to both with superannuation because ---

FALLON: I never had super, except when I went to ---

AHERN: except they won't make me permanent (both laugh) now I think how stupid was that. Anyway.

FALLON: It's a bit of a shame.

AHERN: It's those things that change over time.

FALLON: They did change over time. We --- I --- I mean I spent many years working to nine-thirty in the reference library here, you know, in the early years and when you think about it now --- I mean you do get a lot of strange people coming through a library you know ---

AHERN: Well that's right we use to get some strange ones in there too ---

FALLON: it was warm.

AHERN: Well it is and there still people like that here today I think.

FALLON: I use to work in Worcestershire in England.

AHERN: Oh yeah.

FALLON: And we'd get all the old guys coming in and drying their socks on the radiators in the winter and having a bit of a snooze in the corner you know (laugh) it was a bit of that here as well actually.

AHERN: Oh absolutely yeah. I'm just trying to think who else --- so you wouldn't know what it was like before and after the internet.

FALLON: No, no idea actually.

AHERN: Any of that --- none of that stuff.

FALLON: But I do hope they're on the ball and doing it.

AHERN: Oh they're --- they seem to have a good system. I was part of the introduction of computers for volunteers back in --- I was acting Coordinator for about six months back in about nineteen-ninety I think and we got a little nest of computer and put the in the middle of the room and put the CISSA

information database on it and tried to persuade some of the older volunteers that it was possible to use this when they really wanted to cling to those ---

FALLON: Cards.

AHERN: pink cardboard cards or at most going to the yellow CISSA directory it be happy to do that and trying to convince them that it was all on the computer. It was quite entertaining really, but we got there and now all the volunteers, everybody uses computers and they've done some good things over the years and one of things they did was when ATMs came in they use to run lessons for women on how to use an ATM ---

FALLON: Oh, oh really, oh well.

AHERN: which is really so practical when a lot of older women were absolutely terrified of this new technology and they use to they've done that sort of stuff.

[00:56:03]

FALLON: That's fantastic which is really good.

AHERN: Yeah, which is really good and they go out to field days and they've now got two projects, one happening in the north in a community centre and one happening down at Aldinga in a children's centre and they've got little ---

FALLON: For children or for women, for mothers?

AHERN: No this is outreach volunteers are running it, outreach information services in those two locations, so that women who are bringing their children in for childcare can access information and get really good referrals and yeah --

-

FALLON: That's excellent.

AHERN: So that's worked out really well.

FALLON: Oh that's good.

AHERN: Do you remember the woman --- every woman's survival guide?

FALLON: Yes

AHERN: That little book.

FALLON: Yes I do actually.

AHERN: Well I was the Project Officer.

FALLON: Were you, oh wow.

AHERN: Who got that together cos I had been sent to a meeting on the women's services collective or something and for some reason the Women's Health and the Working Women's Centre and all those Women's Liberation the whole lot of us all got together and decided we needed a little book so everybody wrote a chapter and then we got a CEP project officer Monica Clements and then we hired two clerical people to work as well and the three of them go it together and I had the pleasure and joy of helping them put it all together and get it, get it sorted.

FALLON: Ah fantastic.

AHERN: But that was a great little innovation and we tried to circulate that through hairdressers and places where women wouldn't normally expect to see it ---

FALLON: Expect to see it.

AHERN: and doctors' surgeries we had them all over the place. Dentists we sent them out.

FALLON: And what's happening these days?

AHERN: Well they don't have that publication anymore.

FALLON: It's all online.

AHERN: It's all online. But they do have a website and they do quite a lot of proactive stuff --- I'm now --- because I've, I've sort of snuck back in to be a volunteer at WIS by a securitize root ---

FALLON: I had a look at the website think I might find a phone number that would be of some use and I have to say it seemed a bit dense ---

AHERN: Yeah, well I --- I don't have any involvement with that.

FALLON: You know there just didn't seem to be any ---

AHERN: Wasn't obvious who you rang ---

FALLON: Like a lot of things these days you can't even find a phone --- yeah you can't even get a phone number for a bank or for all sorts of things ---

AHERN: Oh yeah I know

FALLON: And I find that --- I'm old enough to think that's just bloody ridiculous you know I want to talk to someone you know whatever.

AHERN: That's right, you want to ask somebody, yeah that's right. Well I think the personal approach is really important.

FALLON: Yeah I do too.

AHERN: But I've got sort of inveigled back in because both --- I know people and you know I can say you need to talk to this person or that person and I've referred quite a few people in and done quite a lot of interviews which I have really enjoyed cos I've had the pleasure of catching up with people who I haven't seen for ten years, fifteen years, twenty years so its been good for me too.

[00:58:56]

FALLON: Well I've been out of the State, I mean I've always had a place here. My daughter's here and my grandson so I, I --- well actually I worked in Victoria for a while, a couple of years and then I came back here for four years as Director in the Premier's Department and then, what did I do after that --- oh then I --- that's right I resigned again because nobody was going to do anything about anything worthwhile and the Treasury people said 'you can't do that we were going to ask you to do a report on blah, blah, blah' and I went 'you'll have to pay me as a Consultant boys' and I was joking, and they said 'oh okay'. And so before everybody was a consultant, this was way back in ninety-one ---

AHERN: You were a consultant.

FALLON: I became a consultant. So I did a lot of problem solving you know fixing up the Parks or trying to an whatever, different things. And for a few years and then of course by that stage I had met the Monks and my interest in writing indeterminable reports for Governments that didn't want to do anything you know.

AHERN: We you found other things to keep you interested and involved.

[01:00:05]

FALLON: I remember the best, well not the best, no but a piece of work I did which Ann Dunn landed on my lap for some reason.

AHERN: Yes I remember Ann.

FALLON: It was actually for the Victorian Government, it was about gambling and whether they should introduce pokies, this was in Victoria.

AHERN: Oh yeah.

FALLON: And I investigated it, investigated the past history and all the kind of you know, attorney generals and whoever who had something to say on the subject over the years and I wrote a report for Government which I fully expected to be filed without anybody paying it any attention which is exactly what happened. Basically I said don't do it. Do not do this you were told ten years ago, you were told twenty years ago basically it's true, it is really socially terrible thing to do and they didn't want to hear that.

AHERN: No the hotels.

FALLON: They wanted the money.

AHERN: Hotels Lobby group is very powerful isn't it?

FALLON: Oh god I remember a meeting with them yeah. They were very convincing. It was so lovely for the old people to come and have scones and cream and to have lunch and it was no cost and you know it was so lovely for them to get out of the house, oh my god, yeah.

AHERN: Oh yes and a free cup of tea, social service.

FALLON: Shocking it's so.

AHERN: Yeah one of the things I think is interesting about WIS, I don't know if you remember this, but we --- at one stage in the eighties we had Maggie Martinelli, or Maggie Calvert she started off being called and she ran a social security phone in and that eventually turned in to being the Welfare Rights Centre.

FALLON: Oh right.

AHERN: Which was funded for about, up until very recently, it's only lost funding in the last two years or something and that group gave specialist

advice to recipients of social security for a very, very long time. They employed lawyers and were doing great work.

FALLON: Oh fantastic.

AHERN: And that grew out of WIS.

FALLON: Right.

AHERN: Yeah and that was a little offshoot and the Women's Legal Service that's now been going for about ten, fifteen years, it grew out of WIS too. It started when I was at the Legal Services Commission and it was set up by a lot of the women who ---

FALLON: Well Robyn, Robyn.

AHERN: Croydon.

FALLON: No Robyn Layton.

AHERN: Oh yes, Robyn Layton, yes I know Robyn.

FALLON: Was also involved in the very early days to this..... I don't know if she had much to do with it. But I mean she was around the trap.

AHERN: She used to turn up to events, yes, she used to turn up to events. I remember her wonderful coloured hair (laugh).

FALLON: Oh gosh ---

AHERN: That's right, but the Women's Legal Service was almost another offshoot because that grew out of the Saturday afternoon women's legal service that we used to run at WIS where the lawyers use to come in then eventually we used to ring them at their home to give legal advice and then eventually we set up this women's legal service and that was necessary because all the other community legal centres a lot of very abusive men used to go --- every single service and that meant their wives had nowhere to go.

FALLON: Yes, right.

AHERN: To get legal advice that was free and the good thing about the Women's Legal Service is they couldn't go there. So there's at least two services that offshoot.

FALLON: Is somebody --- is somebody --- has anybody --- I mean you're going to be the recipient of a lot of information here and I don't whether its you or someone else but it would be really good to have that written up in terms of what's actually blossomed out of WIS.

[01:03:36]

AHERN: Yes well that's right, well I'm, I'm talking about it in these interviews as I get the opportunities

FALLON: Yeah, Yeah, but it would be good to actually ---

AHERN: I don't know what they're doing about writing up.

FALLON: Wouldn't it be nice, it would be so good.

AHERN: Yeah, well I think someone needs ---

FALLON: The only thing that wasn't so good in the current --- this is very pertinent to the current situation facing a lot of women and men --- do you remember a woman called Suzie, Suzie something or other.

AHERN: Suzie Riggs.

FALLON: Yeah and I remember her running a financial planning evening, the Financial Planning Network I think they called it. And I was in the fortunate position at the time with having a bit of spare money and wondering what to do and I remember coming along to this evening and they were offering these free consultations, and I thought oh well that's interesting I'll have a bit of a

yarn with these people and see. And I remember sitting in this little room with this woman who was saying 'oh well you know what do you want to do and what have you got and.....' and I there well how does this all work and whatever and she's saying ' oh well you know you can, you can invest in this company or that company or whatever' and I going ahhh. So I said so where do you get your money from, like how do you earn your money. Oh its all free, its all free. No I mean where do, do you, who pays you.

AHERN: Commission.

FALLON: And boy she did not want to answer that question it took a lot of --- and in the end, I went nah I get it. No thanks and I just hope a lot of women didn't take financial planning advice ---

AHERN: That was, that was after I left I think that was happening.

FALLON: Because --- I just remember --- that was god that would be you know that's what twenty years ago nearly.

AHERN: Yeah that would have been late eighties was it?

FALLON: Yeah I think Suzie Riggs left didn't she to set up something like that. She actually went and worked for a financial ---

AHERN: Yeah.

FALLON: But it was you know when you, when you see what's happening now ---

AHERN: Oh well that's right.

FALLON: with financial planners it was that, that long ago and women would have been very vulnerable to that, I mean I wasn't, but you know I mean a lot of them would be ---

AHERN: Well when I think about you know the lists we had of plumbers and electricians and female doctors and female this and female that it was no quality control no one ever investigated it to see if these were ethical good practitioners they were just happened to be female and we would just hand out three names and say well ring them up and check them out for yourselves. But now when I look back and I think well there was no quality control we had no idea whether these people were registered builders or whatever we just referred people basically on the base of their gender and really without knowing how qualified and capable they were. But I know I haven't heard of any law suits we got away with it and maybe always giving three names helped ---

FALLON: I might have yeah.

[01:06:27]

AHERN: Because ultimately someone had to make the decision.

FALLON: Oh look in life generally what I've discovered, I'm just a very, you know down to earth Scot really, when it boils down to it. Some good friends of mine who are intelligent people, like intelligent people you know they've either got their own business or they're Journos or they're you know whatever, they've got businesses and they've never had any money really not really you know had any much money and they've come into a bit of money one way or the other and all of them invested in things that went bust, they lost it. And you know I just think how come, like good god.

AHERN: There has been some very strange things have happened and you think sensible people don't --- when it comes to money some people seem to go off ---

FALLON: If they haven't had any and then they get some I think that's when they are really vulnerable you know and its always bother me that --- as I say even people I knew well why didn't you tell, why didn't you ask, why didn't you know.

AHERN: Why didn't you tell me, yeah?

FALLON: But anyway not my business.

AHERN: So has the name of the man Jack who was on the pub --- senior bureaucrat, the Public Service Board, has that name came back to you?

FALLON: Is it Jack Ellis, Jack, Jack, or my god.

AHERN: Anyway if it comes to you let me know because they're bound to ---

FALLON: He's dead; he'd be dead ---

AHERN: He's dead.

FALLON: He's dead a long time ago. He had --- I think he had a melanoma actually.

AHERN: Oh how awful.

FALLON: He had cancer and that was a long, long time ago, like twenty-five years ago.

AHERN: Because if suddenly --- because sometimes things float back into your mind after something like this when you've been talking about the old days. I find that a couple of days later ----

FALLON: I'd tell you who would know but I wouldn't speak to him, the bastard.

AHERN: Ian McPhail (laugh).

FALLON: Is he around, I mean ---

AHERN: I don't, I don't.

FALLON: I think he's interstate these days; I don't know where he is now.

AHERN: I don't know.

FALLON: Mike Schilling, Mike Schilling.

AHERN: I don't know him.

FALLON: Well he was, he wasn't a Commissioner but he was a ---

AHERN: He's a name; he's a name that I remember from the bureaucracy.

FALLON: I'd say he was one of the guys who didn't want me to have the same salary as him. I'd say he was one of those. But he writes letters to The Australian all the time

AHERN: Oh well we know where his politics are.

FALLON: Exactly, exactly and I just, you know I feel like writing to the paper for gods sake what is this, you know doesn't anyone else write to you, this prick is every week, you know. I still buy The Australian because there is nothing else to read and I still love newspapers. If you know where they're coming from.

AHERN: The Guardian Weekly.

FALLON: Oh yeah of course I've read the Guardian for many years.

AHERN: I've bought the Guardian forever. But I don't buy The Australian.

FALLON: We use to buy it in England way back and buy it when we got here, you know, but ---.

AHERN: Anyway ---

FALLON: The Saturday paper is ---

AHERN: It is. Anyway, I'd like to thank you Maureen Fallon for your time and for your discussion of the formation of the Women's Information Switchboard. Thank You.

[01:09:19]

END OF INTERVIEW