

**Oral History: Diana Dooley
The Years with Jerry Brown**

**Interviewed by Pauline Bartolone
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Part 1

Pauline Bartolone: I'm Pauline Bartolone, I'm a reporter here in Sacramento. For the better part of a decade, I've reported for public radio about state government and health policy. You've also seen my byline in Kaiser Health News and various California newspapers. I'm here today with Diana Dooley. She became a top aide for Governor Jerry Brown at a young age. She served with him for all four of his terms, she also helped lead California through sweeping health care reform. She helped create a new government agency, Covered California, which offers subsidized health insurance, and she helped expand Medicaid to millions of people. So we're here with Diana Dooley today as part of an oral history project through Open California, and it's funded by a California State Library grant. So, Diana, thanks for sharing your story with us today. I wanted to start off getting personal about where you're from. You're from a small town called Hanford in southern San Joaquin Valley. What inspired you to leave a farming community and go into politics?

Diana Dooley: Well, like most women my age, I was following a love. My husband of almost 47 years was a year ahead of me in high school. We knew each other, but didn't date. He went to Fresno State. And at the beginning of my senior year, his freshman year, we began dating, and that was 1968. And I, who had a father who only went to eighth grade and a mother who did graduate high school, had no particular ambitions of college. But he was in college, so I wanted to go to college. And I did, followed him to Fresno State. He then, and at the end of his sophomore year, became national vice president of the Future Farmers of America, so he took a year off and traveled around the country. And I accelerated my education by taking extra units and double session summer school, so I graduated in three years in order to get married.

We moved up here to Sacramento. When he came back, he had transferred to UC Davis. He finished his last two years at UC Davis, and then went to law school. And I got a job in state service, which was a very good thing for me. I was very glad of that. But by the time he finished law school in 1975, I was working for the governor of the State of California. I used to pinch myself all the time. How did this happen? I don't know how it happened to answer your question.

Bartolone: Can you tell us a little bit more about how you got into the underbelly of state government so quickly? You were in your mid-20s.

Dooley: I was 24. In the fall of '75, when I went to work in the Governor's office, I had

been a year and a half before a young analyst at the State Personnel board. There was no collective bargaining at the time, pay was set on the basis of the salary survey, and I had worked on the salary survey. The governor in his first year had proposed collective bargaining for public workers, but it hadn't been successful. So, in the fall of that year, he set up an Office of Employee Relations within the governor's office and hired a labor leader, Marty Morgenstern. And Marty hired me on the recommendation of a couple of people who suggested that I knew how the pay structure worked at the State Personnel Board, and that I was a young analyst and I might be helpful.

And so, that's how I came over. I had no background in politics, I had not been involved in anybody's campaign. Just put my head down, did my job, and had an opportunity. Interestingly, all of my supervisors at the State Personnel Board at the time suggested that I shouldn't run the risk of taking an exempt position working for a politician. The job could end at any time. I had a very bright future at the State Personnel Board, and I should just stay there and go through the paces. But at 24, I thought, "What do I have to lose?" It's an opportunity that very few people would ever get. And so, I took it and I'm not sorry.

Bartolone: You were top aide for Governor Brown during all four of his terms. So at first, you were his legislative secretary, so you were basically his lobbyist in state government, then you served as health secretary later on and his executive secretary in his recent term. So do you remember when you first met Jerry Brown? And what was your first impression?

Dooley: I didn't meet him when I first went to work over there. I worked for Marty Morgenstern and Gray Davis was the chief of staff. And so, I don't really recall. It was probably in the development of the budget for the first full year in '76. He had made a proposal in 1975 that workers should be paid in across the board flat-dollar amount instead of a percentage increase. There was a young group of women secretaries that were forming, trying to form a union, it never really developed, called [CASE](#), Clerical and [Allied Service Employees](#), and their motto was 5 percent of nothing is nothing. And so, the governor was unsuccessful again in that during his first year. And then, in the 1976 he proposed it again. And that's the first project I worked on, was a proposal to pay a flat \$70 across the board, which, of course, if you work out the percentages, was much more than 5 percent.

It was the equivalent of a 5 percent overall pay increase, but it was much more meaningful for people below the median and much less meaningful for people above the median, so you can guess who supported it and who didn't. That became a very complex legislative effort. We put it in the budget; it didn't succeed. We had control language; we had to have a bill. So I learned the legislative process working through that proposal. And we had a Republican author of the bill because he had carried the pay bills. Every bill for pay and benefits had to go through the Legislature every year. So I worked very closely with him and he actually recommended to the governor that summer that I had shown some success in the way I dealt with the legislators and that I should come to the legislative staff. So that's how I moved from a technical position to a lobbyist position.

Bartolone: And so, you first came, you first started working for California government in the '70s. Were there many women in leadership in government at that time? And what was that like for you?

Dooley: I was pretty much the first or among the first women in almost everything I did in the '70s. When I went to the State Personnel Board, there were 35 analysts in my division and there were five of us who were women, and the executive director at the time called us “the experiment on the second floor.” They were trying it out to see if women could move into these professional roles. In fact, the first time I interviewed for the State Personnel Board a year before I got the job, I was told that I should start as a secretary and that would give me a better opportunity to move up. The position that I held had the only requirement was a college degree, which I had.

Before that, I had worked as a secretary at a stockbrokers firm, Dean Witter & Company. That was the only house headquartered on the west coast and they had no women brokers. And I started as a secretary and went to one of the Witters who was still a managing partner in the Sacramento office at the time, and asked if they would sponsor me with the Securities and Exchange Commission in order to become a broker, and I was told women weren't brokers at Dean Witter. And that's when I began looking for other jobs. But every step of the way, I always joke that my husband was a feminist before I was. He always believed that we were equals even when I was struggling to find my place. In fact, one of the things of which he is most proud, as I said, he was in the national organization, Future Farmers of America, and he made the motion at the national convention in I think 1966 or '7, to allow women into the organization. And has always been a partner through our various aspects of our lives.

Bartolone: Did you ever deal with sexism when you were a lobbyist for Governor Brown?

Dooley: Well, absolutely. Everybody does. We all do. It's inherent that we deal with gender differences. And some of it is just innate and natural, and some of it is offensive. And there were a lot of experiences where it was offensive. But it was a different time and everybody finds their own way to deal with it. I pretty much let it roll off. It was offensive. But the '70s were a different time too, and I was in an administration where there weren't very many married people. The Legislature, most of the spouses, well, I'll say wives, because most of the members were men. In fact, I was there when Rose Ann Vuich was first elected as the first woman in the Senate. So when I was first lobbying in the Senate, they were all men and they were all older and they were almost all white, so I was like a granddaughter to most of them. And so, some of it was just parochial, diminishing behavior that you would of a young child. But some of it was outright sexual harassment that was also offensive. But I used to joke and say, "I'm sort of an exception in Sacramento. I'm a happily married woman, faithful to my husband. I'm not interested." Everybody deals with it in their own way, but it was absolutely present.

Bartolone: [Can you share a story or an example of when you experienced sexism while](#)

you're working in state government in the '70s?

Dooley: Oh there's so many. It would be hard to choose. Probably one that I've told before, when I moved from the personnel side of the governor's office to the legislative side, I was deputy legislative secretary and we had two deputies at the time, and a leg secretary. BT Collins was the secretary, the deputy for the Assembly and I was the deputy for the Senate and our job was to maintain relationships with the members. I had 40, he had 80 and we worked regularly with them, we would advance the governor's policies but we would also be their liaison to the administration for things that they needed.

So when they had constituents in town, they would often call or we would help in whatever way. There was an Assemblyman from Modesto named John Thurman, he was a dairyman, he was rough talking and rough acting and was the chair of the Ag Committee. He had a group of people in town that were there on health-related issues, and he wanted somebody from the governor's office, so he had called downstairs to our office and asked for BT, "I need BT to come up right now." And he was told that BT wasn't available. "Well, I need Tony Dougherty," who was the legislative secretary and Tony is not available. "You need to send me somebody." And so the staff came over and I was the other deputy that I needed to go up to this committee room.

So I went up to the room and I opened the door, I walked in and he was at the far end of the table and there were people all around, many of whom I knew because they were state people. And I walked in and I said, "Good morning, Mr. Thurman. I'm Diana Dooley from the governor's office." And he leaned back in his chair and said, "If I wanted a god damn secretary, I would have sent for my own." And I said, "Oh, I'm sorry Mr. Thurman." And I shut the door and I left. Well, there were audible gasps in the room, as it was reported to me later and before I made it back to my office, he was on the phone calling to apologize, would I go to lunch with him? He was very embarrassed by his behavior. And we got along famously thereafter.

Bartolone: Wow. You said earlier that you had just kind of let it roll off you. Are there any other strategies that you had for dealing with it? Did your colleagues kind of speak up for you when you experienced sexism?

Dooley: Oh, they did, when it was necessary. There was a story in the newspaper about my appointment, and Senator Alquist, who was from San Jose and a Democrat, but very hostile to Governor Brown, was quoted as saying, "The Governor's office is no place for on-the-job training." And people responded to that in negative. But you just, if you... my attitude always was, if you let it be personal... I think one of the lessons I took away from having that experience as young as I had it was to differentiate between what's personal and what's professional or what's positional. And most of the criticism was positional. I was a stand-in for Jerry, so they would be criticizing Governor Brown, that's when they would... 'Cause they didn't know me and somehow I had the fortitude or constitution or something to know the difference when it wasn't about me.

And so I could set it aside and move on. I know that not everybody can do that, and sometimes you need to stand your ground. And there were times when I did stand my ground, but it never stopped me from getting done what I needed to get done.

Bartolone: Now, you also had your first child while you were serving for Jerry Brown as a top aide in his second term?

Dooley: Well, my husband and I, as all of us, we were young, but I had wanted to start our family and we both worked for the governor, when he finished law school part way through the first term, he was hired by Rose Bird when she was over the Ag Department, and then she went to the court and he stayed and became the Chief Deputy Director of the Department of Food and Agriculture. So we we're both in the government at that time. And my husband was reluctant to start our family with the re-election, so right after the re-election, I said, "OK, now it's time we need to start our family."

I was 28. So the legislative session has a break between October and January. And so, family planner that I am, our daughter was born on November 13th, in 1979. And so I was leg secretary at the time, legislative secretary, so I came back in January with my daughter in tow. When she was three months old, there was an infant day care center near the Capitol and she went there during the day, but until she turned her three months she was... I had a crib in my office, and we got our business done and she slept and it all worked just fine.

Bartolone: Wow. So you were working for those first three months of her life?

Dooley: Oh, yeah.

Bartolone: Wow, you didn't have any time off?

Dooley: Yeah, I had a couple of weeks.

Bartolone: Oh, my gosh. Much different times now.

Dooley: Well, it is much different times, and yet it isn't. I think there's a period... Women have worked with their babies for generations, they strapped them on their backs and they worked in the fields and they did what needed to be done. I think there was a little window of the '50s and '60s where women could afford to, with the leisure of technology, to not be working full-time at their household duties. So working mothers have been around for generations. I didn't feel that exceptional actually.

Bartolone: Now, most recently, you were executive secretary for Jerry Brown after Nancy McFadden died. What exactly does it mean to be the governor's executive secretary? What's your role?

Dooley: Well, the executive secretary is a statutory designation for the governor's Chief of Staff. You're responsible for making sure the trains run on time, working with the

Cabinet who are running the programs and the personal staff who are managing policy issues, legislative affairs, appointments, legal affairs, all of the litigation that comes is eventually managed up to the governor. And so, the role of executive secretary and chief of staff is to make sure that the governor has the information that he needs, that his priorities are met, and that the government is running in all of the ways that it needs to run that don't always need his personal attention.

Bartolone: Is it a decision-making role?

Dooley: Well, you make decisions in everything you do, the priorities, the schedule, the appointments, the... there are decisions that are made every day, that we started with a morning call with the closest staff in the governor and set the priorities for the day, what the press needs were, what the legal needs were, what the Cabinet needs were, what regulations were being proposed, what legislation needed attention. All of those are decisions that have to be organized and managed so that the governor can be efficient and effective.

Bartolone: Did you ever advise him on policy? Would he say, "Diana, I'm really not sure how to handle this particular situation. Can you go deploy some researchers and report back to me on what to do?"

Dooley: Well, in the 40-plus years, I don't think I've ever heard Jerry Brown say, "I'm not sure." He isn't sure a lot of the time, and his Socratic method of inquiring would let everyone know that he isn't sure, but he isn't sure in a way that doesn't use that kind of language. But, yes, of course. I discussed a variety of policy issues with him in the first term, when we were dealing with legislation, certainly this time on health policy from the beginning of the transition, of course, we were in 2011 at the end of 2010, facing gargantuan deficit of \$27 billion. We had many policy decisions that had to be made in order to both balance the budget and prepare to implement the Affordable Care Act. Certainly, in this last year, working through the issues at the end with PG&E and the wildfires and the issues with management of issues in state government, there were a number of issues, the clemency, all of the bills that were dealt with at the end of the year. I worked with him on all of those issues.

Bartolone: The LA Times quoted you as being... Well, they described you as being his "affable alter ego," and a "terrestrial complement to Governor Moonbeam." What is your response to that description of you? Is that accurate?

Dooley: Well, I don't think things are either or, black and white, I'm a social person, I like to entertain, I like to engage, I listen well, and I think he does, too. I think that his inquiring approach, he tends to be a little more acerbic, and, I think, certainly it sounds like that was probably a quote from Brown 1.0 and not Brown 2.0. That was often the case, because my life was so different than his. I was married, I had a child while I worked for him, and so there was the bachelor governor and the young, married, professional mother. So people like to put things in oppositional relationship. I don't think I'm necessarily as affable as that might say, or that he is as certainly not Moonbeam, I

think.

Bartolone: As you mentioned earlier, he was rather philosophical. He liked to talk about Jesuits and the Pharaohs and Buddhist philosophy. How did you go about putting his philosophical approach into kind of nuts and bolts leadership?

Dooley: Well, I wouldn't say it is, again, that direct. I am an implementer. You give me a task and I do everything humanly possible to get it done. So I've often said that I like to play defense more than offense, but you give me the ball and I'll run with it. And so, there were never any issues that I disagreed on. I very much supported the direction that he wanted to go. I'm naturally frugal, so being efficient and assuring that we're doing the very best we can with the resources we have was natural for me. Moving the ball forward, I joked and I've always called myself a passionate moderate. I think that sounds like an oxymoron, but I think you have to be passionate about the middle.

I joked when I moved to Tulare County for the intervening 26 years between my Sacramento experiences, that being a Democrat in Tulare County was like doing missionary work, but I learned a lot from people that I didn't agree with, and worked side by side with, and I think that being able to... I joked also and said that, I stay a Democrat because I like the crazies in my party better than the crazies in the other party. I respect the people on the poles, they pull the middle in the right direction.

But I'm an implementer. I want to get things done. So I think working for someone like Jerry Brown was a natural fit for me because he is brilliant, he's insightful, but he's also so politically aware of how far to move, where those edges are. I've never seen or known or watched anybody as good as he is at knowing where the edge is so that he can move right up to it in the direction that he wants to go and move it forward. And I'm very proud of the things we were able to do in this round, 2.0, moving the social agenda very far forward.

Bartolone: I want to get back to something you said. You said you've never disagreed with Jerry Brown about anything? I find that hard to believe. You worked with him for what? 15-16 years, there was never any time where you guys butted heads on how to approach something?

Dooley: Not that I can think of. They're always robust conversations and I certainly disagreed with my colleagues, we would have very intense conversation sometimes, but typically about tactic or strategy, not about objective. There are no key objectives that the Governor wanted to achieve that I felt were not the right place to go. I may disagree on how we should get there. How far or how fast or with whom, who should take the lead, who should work behind the scenes, those kinds of things. I know there were many disagreements, not necessarily with him, but perhaps there were, but certainly on where we wanted to go, I don't recall any real differences of opinion.

Bartolone: OK, so you were with him for his four terms in office, how did you see him evolve as a politician, how did he change over the years?

Dooley: Well, I think the things that are the same are his intellect, his integrity, his insatiable appetite for more information. I think his experience in Oakland was very powerful, and I think of my own experience at the local level, working to do real things. I think when I left in 1983 at the end of 1.0, I had a sense of frustration that there weren't tangible things that we could point to. And working at the local level, you really pick up the trash, you really deal with the police, you really deal with the neighborhoods, you really deal with building. When he did the housing commitment to downtown Oakland, they really built houses, they built buildings, they built 10,000 units in Oakland. That gives you a grounding in the relationship between the policy ideas that you work on necessarily at a state or federal level, with the local ability to make things happen. So when he came back and looked at this deficit and looked at the ways to address it, he understood what redevelopment was about, he understood what criminal justice was about in a way that he didn't have that grounding in his experience in the '70s.

Bartolone: That's really interesting. Now, as you mentioned you left state government for a long time between the first two terms and the second two terms with Jerry Brown. What made Jerry Brown call you back to service? What about your relationship made you guys click so well?

Dooley: Well, I think he has always stayed in touch with people and while we didn't work on a lot of things, there were times when he was doing his radio show that we would be in touch and I certainly worked with his sister when she was the treasurer, Kathleen. And so, in fact, she was the first one that suggested on election night as I recall, in Oakland, in 2010 when she saw me, she said, "You have to do this health thing, you have to help Jerry with the health." And I hadn't thought much about that. I was the CEO of the California Children's Hospital Association at the time, but that really started the conversations. And I had some conversations with the transition team, and it just sort of became a natural evolution. I knew something about health. I had a relationship with him. It was going to be a difficult policy area given the deficit and so he... We never really had a deep conversation about it. "You're going to help me out," and I said, "OK." And we went off to the races.

Bartolone: So Governor Gray Davis was executive secretary for Governor Brown during his first two terms?

Dooley: Yes.

Bartolone: How would you say his approach was different from yours, and different from Nancy McFadden's?

Dooley: Interesting.

Bartolone: If it was different?

Dooley: Well, I think in the first two terms, one real difference was Jerry was surrounded

with peers, people his age. We were all young, we were sort of the children's brigade. Jerry was 36 when he was elected, Gray was 34, I was 24 when we came in. The old men were 40, like, I think Tony Kline and Marc Poche were a little bit older than Jerry, but not much, if any. And there were a lot of people in that, in their 30s that had strong views and strong ideas and there was a lot, and the Governor wasn't married, had nowhere to go at night and would often stay 'til midnight or 1 o'clock in the office, philosophizing or strategizing or talking about things. I usually didn't stay, I went home, but I would make things happen, would work on it. So there was a very different interaction in the Governor's Office. The governor's cabinet was very diverse, a lot of people with strong views and opposition to each other. Huey Johnson was at Resources and Rich Rominger was at Food and Ag and Rose Bird, before she went to the court was over the Ag Department.

So there were a lot of... There was a lot of energy, intellectual as well as political. Nancy was one of the most skillful people I have ever encountered, in that she had an incredible political sense, but deep respect for the operation of government, she had worked in government in the Clinton administration, she had worked briefly at the end of the Gray Davis administration as governor, and she brought a skill set that was truly extraordinary. She played both defense and offense; she was just extraordinary. They were different people in different times.

Bartolone: Most recently you became Executive Secretary to Jerry Brown after Nancy McFadden died. How was that transition for you, and how was that decision made for you to become secretary after she passed?

Dooley: Well, it was a very, very difficult time for everyone. Nancy had been ill when she worked for Gray Davis back in 15 years ago, 20 maybe, in the early 2000s, with a serious cancer that responded very well to treatment, and she was cancer-free for many years. And when her cancer recurred, she fought it with amazing bravery, but Nancy was... As political and powerful as she was, she's a very private person, and she kept her illness private, and those who knew about it respected her privacy, and it was not publicly known until she acknowledged it in January last year. She had been suffering for the last few months after the legislative session in 2017, but continuing to meet her obligations, she worked from home, she was on phone calls every day.

She was still guiding the work and supporting the Governor and the administration, so the loss of her in March seemed sudden and unexpected to many people because she had fought so bravely and so privately for so long. So there was a very hard sense emotionally, as well as professionally. She was an extraordinary leader, and people really had to grieve, but we had to finish. We still had 10 months left in the administration. The Governor and Anne had spoken to me two weeks after her passing. And we had all learned to manage with her illness, and I think we all had some sense, could we just keep managing without her? And we jointly came to the sense that I would leave the Health and Human Services Agency and come over to help the team finish strong.

To support, not just the governor, but the team, both in the governor's office and

throughout the administration. I'd known him longer than anyone else. I'd served with people throughout the administration for the previous seven and a half years, and so I think it was a combination of caretaker social support, but we also had some really big things that we had to deal with. We had the PG&E crisis, needed a strong hand to help guide the work. And in respect for the influence of Nancy, she didn't do nothing. There was a lot of work to do, it was a job that needed to be done. And I did everything I could to show the proper respect to understand and support on an emotional level, the loss that people were feeling, but also out of respect for her spirit to keep it moving and to finish strong, and I think we were able to do that.

Bartolone: OK, what was it like working with Anne Gust Brown? Was she always in the room, would you sometimes deal with her more than you dealt with Jerry?

Dooley: No, I wouldn't say. I dealt with Jerry more, he was certainly in the office, and the lead. Anne is brilliant; she is deeply committed to his goals and what he wants. I never saw one example of something that, where she wanted to go her own way, she wasn't like wanting to have her own set of issues. Like some spouses carve off areas, they were the most complete unit I could imagine. She had certainly differences of opinion, very strong opinions and disagreed with him and with us, again mostly on tactics, of how we should go and sometimes what we should do, but a tremendous asset to everyone. She participated when it was necessary, or she wanted to, but she also provided just great support in a variety of ways. It was a great pleasure to get to know and work with Anne.