

Political life for me began in a small town in Connecticut. My children were very young when we moved there. I was lucky to be able to be home with them. It was the late seventies and for most women that was their full time job. Once the children began school, I joined the school PTO.

From PTO, I moved to becoming a Board of Education member and then chairman. I had an eye on my children and making strides to improve our town's educational system. As the children got older, I worked part-time and moved onto other committees in the town and eventually became a member of the Board of Selectman then First Selectman, similar to Mayor in a small town.

Campaigning is hard work yet energizing. Lots of knocking on doors, handing out my campaign material outside of local stores, fund raising to buy signs and ads, wonderful encouraging volunteer supporters, friends running dinners at their homes where we all helped cook and bake. It took a while for my husband to get on board but my children were always incredibly supportive. They all helped in so many ways, from putting up campaign signs, to my daughter helping cook for the fund raising dinners, while my youngest son and his high school friends worked as experienced waiters. We even had a murder mystery event at a historic mill that was offered to me by one of my devoted supporters. We lugged my microwave, kitchen ware, pots, and servers to his home. While other volunteers baked and warmed hors d'oeuvres as they struggled with an old, old stove. The evening was a great success, packed with people and everyone had a great time and the mystery was solved.

I was the first woman ever elected as First Selectman. There was much celebrating when I took the oath of office. It was very exciting and great fun. Once behind the desk, I was determined to prove that a woman could do this job honestly, fairly, and in a bipartisan manner. After all, this was a predominately Republican town and I was a woman and a Democrat.

I took my oath of office in November and soon Christmas was around the corner. The Public Works Department was looking for their Christmas Turkey that they always got from the former First Selectmen. The Teamster Union representative was notified after one of the employees made a formal complaint that the Turkey may not be forth coming.

The Town Hall employees started to grumble to me that they never got a turkey and that was not fair. What was I going to do about it? Public Works was an all-male group and for the most part Town Hall employees were women. My first dilemma!

I thought it really was unfair and struggled for a solution. Buying turkeys for all the employees would be expensive. So, like any woman who has volunteered at PTO and fairs, I made my decision in the kitchen. I knew a kitchen supplies discount store and bought 60 pie plates. At that time, a selectman's pay was very low. And a week before Christmas started making my family's favorite recipe – Irish shortbread.

My amazing children were recruited to stir while I filled and refilled ingredients. It was labor intensive and took all day. They were amazing and supported every idea and volunteer project I initiated. My husband thought I was crazy but I knew I was right.

The shortbread was baked in the pie plates then wrapped with a red bow. Each employee not only got the delicious shortbread but a Pyrex pie plate.

The Town Hall employees were delighted since they had never been included in the Christmas gifting before, not so much the Public Works. Actually, in the past some of the men gave away their turkeys so they did enjoy receiving the shortbread. But of course, there is always some male Turkey who has to make a stand. So he filed a grievance against me through the Teamster Union complaining that he did not get his Christmas Turkey.

A meeting was set which included me and the Town's lawyer on one side of the table with the Teamster's local representative and their lawyer on the other side. Of course the employee was not present – not such a brave turkey. Such a fuss! The two Teamsters were actually embarrassed to have to follow this grievance process and were at a loss for words. However my esteemed lawyer was not and explained to them that the turkey was a gift from previous First Selectmen to the employees and each selectman could decide if and what they might want to do. This First Selectman's decision was to give every employee the same gift that she paid for out of her own pocket. They withdrew the grievance and sheepishly left. And that's how a woman handled this difficult situation.