**A young mother from Healesville breaks political barriers with Gracia Baylor AM audio transcript**

*Gracia Baylor*:

I was teaching art and French in various schools. My husband came from Ireland actually, he was working for a law firm and he bought a practice in Healesville. It was such a pretty place. We loved it from the start, and we stayed there nearly 40 years.

I got involved in local organizations. As my children were born, I was very concerned that there was no kindergarten in Healesville, because I was anxious that my children had a year of kindergarten before they went to primary school. I thought this was something lacking in the town. We couldn't get through to the councillors of the day and became very frustrated. Council was made up mostly of farming men.

I decided in the end that I would stand for the council myself and try and persuade them. My youngest child was only 18 months old. And I went around door knocking. I was accused... that if I got into the council that I would neglect my children. But I didn't take much notice. I knew what I was on about. I had the full support of my husband. So, when the votes came in, I topped the poll.

I actually served for three terms on the Healesville Council. After each term I was re-elected and I was overlooked for Shire president. It wasn't until the year before I left council that I became Shire president. My words were not given much credence, but I just worked at it. Not only did we get the kindergarten up and running, but we also got the first social housing built in Healesville. And then the third thing that I was adamant about that we should have a public library. In the end we got a free library. All those things are still there today.

And then I was approached by the Liberal Party to stand for Boronia province when a vacancy came up, and that took me into the state parliament then at the 1979 election. There was another woman elected at the same time, but I became the first woman sworn in. In the party room, of course, there were women in the lower house, but certainly on our side, in the upper house, I was alone. I think the people who found it hard to accept women were the clerks. It was a very male atmosphere. So, I remember sitting in one of these red leather chairs in the member's room at the back of the chamber and the clerk coming in and taking a double look. And I think he was on the point of saying, "I'm sorry, you can't sit there," realizing that I could sit there as a right. But that never worried me. It's my right to sit there and it's my right to speak and I spoke.

I was a feminist always because I believe in equal opportunity, but I've never subscribed to the idea of going and protesting. I believe the only way to make progress is to get where the decision-making is done. And that's what I attempted to do.

When John Cain was the premier in Victoria, they decided to sell a lot of crown land because they were short of money at the time. So, they introduced a bill called the Miscellaneous Lands Act, and it was during that debate that we managed to excise the Queen Victoria Hospital site. That hospital was a hospital for women by women, the Queen Victoria Hospital was built by donations of women all around Victoria, called the Shilling Fund. And of course, John Cain was terribly annoyed. I remember him ringing me up when I got home to the hills, at midnight, and saying "what do you think you are doing?" I told him that “we wanted part of that hospital kept for the women of Victoria. They bought it”. We ended up with one tower and the rest of it now is the QV Centre. So it's there for women.

It was brought to my attention that a lot of babies were being severely injured, if not killed when there were car crashes. We got these baby capsules available through various local government centres, like child welfare centres.

I've had a lot of interesting experiences. I was involved in the National Council of Women, and then I got onto the International Council of Women. So, I did a lot of travel taking up women's issues at an international level. So, I've been busy, kept busy, always.

It's amazing how Healesville has grown, and the town is really buzzing, it's becoming like in France where towns of regions become known for their food. So, it's upward and onward for Healesville, I think.

*Kitty Owens, Yarra Ranges Regional Museum*:

What advice do you have for young women who are interested in representing their local communities in politics?

*Gracia Baylor*:

I say go for it. The only way that a woman can wield some power in government is to be a minister. That's where the power lies. That's where they can make changes. Though, when they sit around the table with men, you won't get anywhere if you're too abrasive, you just do your homework, put up a good argument, and then men will support you. So that's my message, but it's not an easy road.