

It was in the early 70's, while I was a G.I. Bill student of Economics at U.C. Berkeley, that my public political involvement took off. I was impressed by several courses in Urban Economics presented by a youthful professor, Michael Wiseman, who treated his subject with excitement and scope. He broadly examined the costs of housing, infrastructure, government and services. He also included the costs of the lack of services to the city dweller. One example I found especially curious was the "U Shaped Service Curve". It illustrated how low-income people received services through public funding and the rich received services because they simply paid for what they wanted, and the people with middle-incomes often did without.

When I began studying at the University, my involvement in local politics was non-existent. All that changed, almost by accident, when my room-mate became involved in a May Day anti-war demonstration and ended up being arrested and jailed with several other protesters. Seeking help for his release, I went to the organization that planned the event, "People's Coalition for Peace and Justice" it was then located in an office over the Metropole restaurant and bar in downtown Berkeley. Unfortunately, they were totally ineffective in bailing out or defending the arrested protestors. At their suggestion I founded "People's Legal Services". Using my own funds, I bailed out my friend and the others, and continued to help them until eventually their charges were dropped. My strictly volunteer work at People's Legal Services expanded as my new found friends at People's Coalition advertised more services.

While still carrying a full program in economics, I diverted my research to landlord law, tenant/welfare rights and housing issues, resulting in numerous leaflets that clarified the bureaucratic maze that many must confront. My instincts were that government should be moved to the local, neighborhood level and that central control should be reduced. (Almost a century earlier Berkeley had government by small districts.) As coordinator of People's Legal Services my position was generally supportive of renters. However, I discovered a tenant element that contrived to use Berkeley's protective rent control laws to financially ruin some property owners. "Tenantitus", is my term for those who operated on the fringes of the law. I was frequently consulted on issues

even remotely related to housing. For example, leaders of the newly founded April Coalition put me in charge of interviewing and selecting a Black Panther Party member to be their candidate for rent board. After this candidate won a seat on the board the entire Rent Board was declared unconstitutional.

Political activity seemed to be entering every level of community life by the time I graduated Phi Beta Kappa in Economics from U.C. in 1972. The one job advertised in my field in a County Assessor's office was said to have had 2,000 applicants, I was advised not to apply. Out of school and with no job yet, I had extra time for something interesting. I heard of grassroots organizing that had begun with the focus of preserving the character of Berkeley. Students of architecture had found this city a wondrous combination of historical styles and original designs. Still, many fine buildings were deteriorating because of disinvestment by absentee owners who continued to rent until the buildings became unrentable/unsafe and were then demolished. Where one small house had been located on a small lot, there was now a multi-unit ticky-tacky jammed into its place. Several neighborhoods had organized into groups to hold off developers. At a south Berkeley conference on housing issues called by Martha Nicoloff (Chair of the North Berkeley Neighborhood Council) the idea of writing a city-wide proposal to put the community back in the planning process was on the agenda. After the meeting, I offered the idea of a land-use initiative, such as the Coastal Preservation Initiative that had recently received state voter approval.

Ms Nicoloff was very impressed by the suggestion. It was just the pressure device needed to give scattered neighborhood groups hope that demolition could be stopped and new development would be scaled back. The putting together of the Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance had begun. A task that would involve many people from all over Berkeley. The April Coalition political party went along with NPO, because it hit their agenda to save low cost housing and it linked up with a moderate rent control law.

The trials and tribulations of the initiative campaign for NPO are well documented in this 300 page record. Papers that were collected and saved from that time by myself and Martha Nicoloff can be studied by those interested in one of the first land-use citizen's initiative.

NPO was a great success at the poles, and its interim building controls kept developers at bay while the mandate to rewrite the city's Master Plan and Zoning Ordinances was carried out.

Dictated to Martha Nicoloff, January 1993

*Martha Nicoloff*