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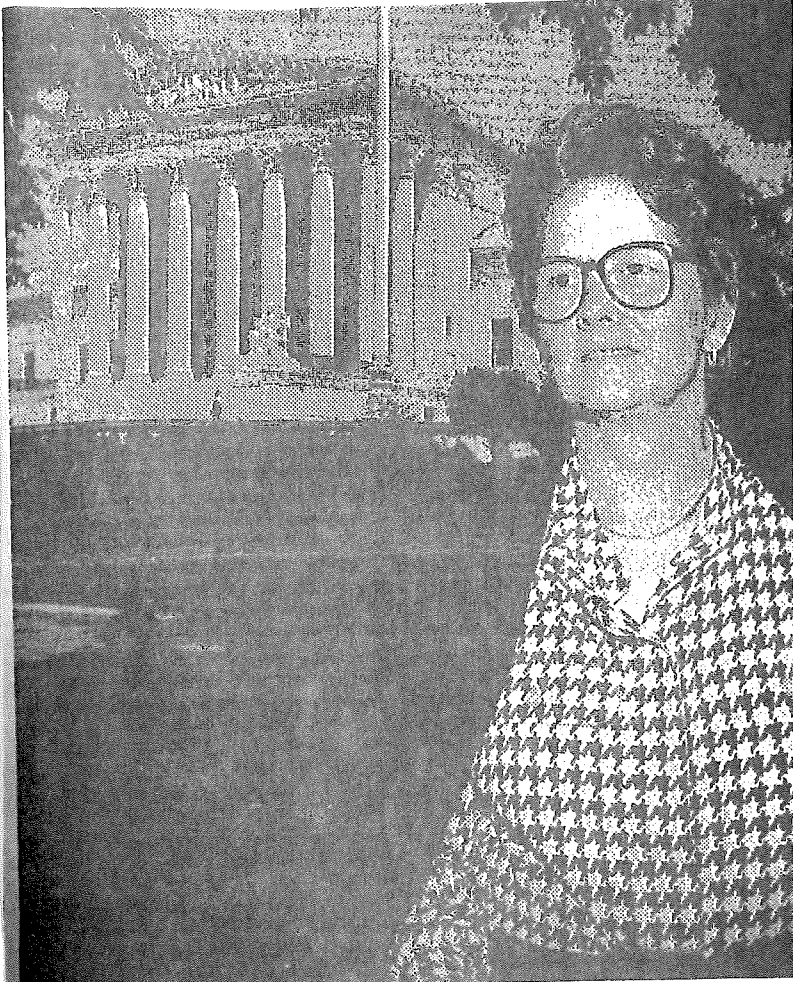
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Bruce Young for The New York Times

Ann Hopkins won a Federal sex discrimination case on Monday against Price Waterhouse, which awarded her the partnership she was denied in 1983. "I'm not tough," she said. "I'm tough-minded."

Winner of Sex Bias Suit Set to Enter Next Arena

By TAMAR LEWIN
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 17 — Everyone has been asking Ann Hopkins the same question this week.

Could she really go back to Price Waterhouse after a seven-year legal fight in which she repeatedly heard that she had not been given a partnership at the huge accounting firm because she was too macho, universally disliked and in need of "a course at charm school"?

The question seems to puzzle this self-described Army brat, who drags on cigarettes and sips beer as she makes her way through a week of interviews and well-wishers.

Ms. Hopkins, 46 years old, said she did not feel hurt by the comments that formed the basis of the sex discrimination lawsuit that was decided here on Monday by a Federal district judge who awarded her the partnership she was denied in 1983.

She said it would be fine to be a partner in a firm where it had been established, for the record, that she was not wanted, because she was sure of her abilities as a management consultant and wanted a chance to use them at a top-notch concern. In any case, she added, many of the people who criticized her are no longer in the Washington office.

Impervious to Rejection

Ms. Hopkins almost seems impervious to rejection. She said that until her husband, Tom, walked out the door one Wednesday morning five years ago, leaving her with three young children, she had no clue that the marriage was in trouble. Furthermore, she said, he is her one true love, and if he walked back in, she would take him right back.

Is she actually that tough?

"I'm not tough; I'm tough-minded," Ms. Hopkins said in an interview today. "And I'm comfortable with what I am. It doesn't bother me."

Her friends see something else. They say she has been devastated by the comments about her. But they add that after seven years of fighting for the right to be a partner at Price Waterhouse, Ms. Hopkins would be foolish to say that she was not comfortable going back.

"Ann has been crushed by this," said Ruth Hopper, her longtime friend and next-door neighbor in Northwest Washington. "She's been very much hurt by some of the things that Price Waterhouse has said. You have to be cognizant that someone who has had to contain her hurt for many years, as she has, learns not to drop her defenses, to keep her counsel or to make jokes. She's not going to tell you she's cried about it, as she has many times."

With her colleagues at the World Bank, where she now works as a budget planner, she treats the comments from the lawsuit that she should wear makeup and jewelry and learn to walk, talk and dress "more femininely" as a standing joke.

'Do I Walk Funny?'

At an office party held this week at the World Bank to celebrate the completion of a budget, Ms. Hopkins offered a toast to her co-workers for their help in handling the deluge of calls from reporters since the decision was announced Monday. Then she said, "It's true I don't wear make-up, but come on, guys, you can tell me — do I walk funny?"

There were hugs all around, and then laughter as Ms. Hopkins, saying that it might be true that she could use charm school, quaffed champagne straight from the bottle.

Ms. Hopkins then briskly left the party, and, because her shoes hurt, hailed a taxi to take her four blocks to the bar where two women who had worked with her at Price Waterhouse were celebrating her court victory.

They talked about the case (she passed out copies of the decision), whether Price Waterhouse would appeal (she thinks they will) and whether Price Waterhouse is a leading firm worldwide (she defends it).

And when she left the table briefly, they rushed to say that while she might seem brusque, the manner masked a warm, generous friend.

Ms. Hopper echoed that. "She will do absolutely anything for you," she said. "She's kind, she's gracious, and she's intelligent. She also worked very hard at Price Waterhouse, and brought in an incredible amount of business, and the reason they didn't produce anyone who worked for her to testify against her at trial was that no one would. She also works very hard as a single parent."

"I've never been a very patient person," Ms. Hopkins said. "The notion of being up all night changing diapers and getting baby bottles, and then having a nice relaxing day of diapers and baby bottles, you must be kidding."

She says that she has always talked to her children, Tela, 14, Gilbert, 12, and Peter, 10, as if they were adults.

No 'Goo-Goo's' and 'Ga-Ga's'

"I didn't goo-goo and ga-ga," she said, "I never learned baby talk."

What Ms. Hopkins did learn, from her childhood, was how to be an outsider. "I'm third generation, small-town Texas, and from the right side of the tracks," she said. "But that's not the whole story."

Her military father moved the family every few years, from Galveston, Tex., to West Germany, to Kansas, to Tennessee, back to West Germany, and then to Alexandria, Va.

"I have no understanding of people who are concerned about jerking kids out of school," she said. "I thought of it as, 'Hey guys, what's next?' That's probably why I'm a management

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And I'm comfortable with what I am.'

consultant. Hey guys, what's next?"

Ms. Hopkins went to Hollins College in Virginia and majored in mathematics, then to graduate school in Indiana. After a brief teaching stint, she took a job at I.B.M. in Washington, where she found that she loved being a manager.

Ms. Hopkins met her husband at Touche Ross, one of the nation's largest accounting firms, but after they married, she ran up against the rule that where both husband and wife work for the company, neither will be considered for a partnership. So in 1978 she moved to Price Waterhouse, where five years later, of the 88 candidates for partnership, she had brought in the most business.

"The explanation I got about why I didn't make partner didn't make sense to me," she said. "I filed suit not because of the money, but because I had been given an irrational explanation for a bad business decision."

Once having filed suit, Ms. Hopkins said, it never occurred to her to turn back, even as the case dragged on, making its way to the Supreme Court and back down to the Federal district court. Anyway, she said, Price Waterhouse never offered to settle.

"One of the worst days of my life was when the Supreme Court took it," she said, since she had already won twice in the lower courts, and had everything to lose and nothing to gain.

But assuming there is no further appeal, she has gained a lot: the first court-awarded partnership in a professional firm, plus back pay that will come to about \$400,000.

"It's been an ever-present thing in her life for seven years," said Ms. Hopper. "And probably the longer it goes on, the more she needs vindication."

Ms. Hopkins, for her part, plays down the stress of the lawsuit.

"I'm a single parent with a 4,500-square-foot house, and dealing with my children has been a much more preoccupying concern than Price Waterhouse," she said.