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Review of *Mayor Helen Boosalis: My Mother's Life in Politics*. By Beth Boosalis Davis

Jan P. Vermeer

Nebraska Wesleyan University

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Mayor Helen Boosalis: My Mother's Life in Politics. By Beth Boosalis Davis. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. xx + 531 pp. Photographs, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.

The title of Beth Davis's final chapter in this biography of her mother encapsulates the book's main message: "Life ~~After~~ Is Politics" for Helen Boosalis, a former mayor of Lincoln, Nebraska. Boosalis's life story is ostensibly the story of her political life. Davis, a past local government official herself, strives to describe not just the mayor's personal side or her political work but to demonstrate the intertwining of the two.

Underpinning the story is extensive research into newspaper files from the period, buttressed by scrapbooks, clippings, and memorabilia that her family, chiefly her father, collected over the years. Interviews with numerous local and national political figures conducted in the course of Davis's research provide telling quotations and insights as well.

A unique feature of the book is the alternating narratives of the mayor's political career and the historic 1986 gubernatorial election in Nebraska, the first in the nation where each major party nominated a woman, drawing national attention to this Plains state. This approach gives Davis a subtle way to make an important point, especially to readers who chiefly remember Boosalis from her loss to Kay Orr. Here is the story of that campaign, but to understand it, Davis implies, you need to know about my mother's political career as a whole.

A close reader will find here a history of Lincoln politics of the period, seen through the eyes of its dominant figure. The conflicts between "neighborhood activists" and "business

interests" that dominated the attention of contemporary political observers are presented here from Boosalis's perspective; similar conflicts occurred in cities throughout the region. One wonders, however, whether participants in these conflicts from the "opposition" would agree with the interpretations of events offered here.

Make no mistake: this book is a memoir, not a scholarly biography. Davis places Boosalis in a larger political context, for women in politics, for instance. But her treatment of that context is sketchy; the list of academic works consulted is sparse. If one expected an academic work a historian might prepare, one would be disappointed. But as the story of Davis's mother, a woman who made a difference to opponents and supporters alike, it is engaging and informative.

Doubtlessly, for Helen Boosalis, life and politics were inextricably interconnected; to tell the story of Boosalis, the mayor, is to tell the story of Boosalis, the person. Davis does her mother proud.

JAN P. VERMEER
Department of Political Science
Nebraska Wesleyan University