

An Interview with
Kathy Osborn

at the Historical Society of Missouri St. Louis
Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri

12 November 2014

Interviewed by Dr. Blanche M. Touhill

Transcribed by Valerie Leri and edited by
Josephine Sporleder



Oral History Program

The State Historical Society of Missouri

Collection S1148 International Women's Forum DVD 66

NOTICE

1) This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17, U.S. Code). It may not be cited without acknowledgment to the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, a Joint Collection of the University of Missouri and the State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts, Columbia, Missouri. Citations should include: [Name of collection] Project, Collection Number C4020, [name of interviewee], [date of interview], Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, Missouri.

2) Reproductions of this transcript are available for reference use only and cannot be reproduced or published in any form (including digital formats) without written permission from the Western Historical Manuscript Collection.

3) Use of information or quotations from any [Name of collection] Collection transcript indicates agreement to indemnify and hold harmless the University of Missouri, the State Historical Society of Missouri, their officers, employees, and agents, and the interviewee from and against all claims and actions arising out of the use of this material.

For further information, contact: State Historical Society of Missouri, St. Louis Research Center, 222

Thomas Jefferson Library, One University Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63121 (314) 516-5119

PREFACE

The interview was taped on a placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets []. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [""] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
NOVEMBER, 2014
KATHY OSBORN INTERVIEWED BY DR. BLANCHE TOUHILL

Kathy Osborn: Kathy Osborn. Currently I head up the Regional Business Council. It's a consortium of 100 CEOs of large companies and our mission is essentially to make St. Louis a better place to live and work and make a home. I was previously vice chancellor here at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. It was a job I loved. I did that for a number of years and ended up working under a really fabulous chancellor, Blanche Touhill.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about your youth: who were your parents; did they encourage you; did you have brothers and sisters; in those days, did you play with your sisters and brothers or did you play with the neighborhood; your elementary/secondary school; were you a leader in that group. Just talk in general.

Kathy Osborn: Okay. I grew up in a family of seven. I was the oldest. When I was in high school, my parents had quite a bit of financial adversity so I started working when I was 14 at St. John's Hospital and that experience of going to school and working and then, because I was the oldest, often when Mom was working, I would also be helping to take care of my younger sisters and brothers, whether that be getting dinner on the table or doing homework or whatever we needed to do. I grew up in a rather typical '50s household though. Mom did not work. Dad did and so there was a lot of playing because there was always a baby on the way and so there's lots of pictures of me carrying babies. We all pitched in and it seemed like that was all fun and jolly. As I got older and things got more complicated, there were some things I had to step up to... to help my parents and I did that. It wasn't always easy but, frankly, at the time, I was young, I had a lot of energy. We went to parochial schools and I went to St. Joseph's Academy and the thing that I very distinctly remember about that is my father must have said, "Oh, my gosh, I'm going to have all these girls

coming along..." ...there were six girls, one boy..."into St. Joseph's Academy, a lot of tuition money so I'm going to send them all over to Ladue" and I just went crazy: "You can't do this to me. I can't do that" and he said, "Okay, go to work." So I went to work, 3:00 to 11:00, got out of high school early to go to pay for my tuition at St. Joseph's Academy. It seems sort of silly now but at the time, I was on a course and I wanted to stay the course. And I did get an excellent education there. I have no doubt my sisters and brothers got a great education at Ladue as well but I got a very good education. But that set, again, the course. I very distinctly remember in high school...and I don't know who the teacher is...but it was an English teacher and what she said is, "You're very smart and you need to go to the Mark Twain Summer Institute." At the time, Mark Twain Summer Institute, I believe, was run out of the Clayton Schools or maybe that was later. It was supposed to be a place for gifted people. Nobody had ever said that. I don't believe that I am gifted but she saw something and that summer I took two courses, one in particular, Utopia, studio of Utopian literature. I can remember today what it felt like, going, what the books were like, how excited I was to be with all these smart kids. So it was a really life-changing experience in that way. It was the first time somebody said, "You're smart." Really, prior to that, I was a rather quiet student, someone intimidated by the nuns growing up and so I was a good girl. So I was your classic good girl: stay out of the way; work hard; watch the boys get in trouble, but stay out of it. So that had an imprint on my life, positive and negative. On the positive side, I know how to get along with people, but I did have to learn later on how to assert myself, how to speak up, how to be comfortable stating my own views on things, and of course that emerged through high school but, more particularly in college and after college as well.

Blanche Touhill: Were you recognized as a leader in grade school?

Kathy Osborn: In grade school, two things: in the year book of grade school, in 8th grade, they said I was going to be a scientist or a comedian, so one of the ways that I think I coped with being shy was to be kind of fun-loving and make jokes and things of that sort. So that was my personality there. What happened to me in high school is, at the time, I probably was the only person who worked so it isn't as today, where so many people do work and go to school. I was the only person. So I was voted mostly likely to succeed and I'm convinced that they all looked around and said, "Well,

my golly, she's working; we're not. She's going to go someplace in life." I really don't know what their rationale was but I do remember that and, interesting enough, St. Joseph's Academy has produced a lot of leaders so it's produced a lot of women who have gone onto leadership spots but I can't say that they said, "You're a woman and you're going to be a leader." I think they just provided a really solid, well-rounded education where, frankly, women could feel comfortable to express themselves among other women and teachers that were very smart. It was a very rigorous school. It wasn't something you could just play around. You had to do a good job on your assignments as well.

Blanche Touhill: How did you do your homework?

Kathy Osborn: Well, that's an interesting thing. A couple things: I worked 3:00 to 11:00 so on my breaks, I went in the break room and did my homework and then I came home at 11:00 o'clock and did my homework. So what that did develop is a life-long habit of knowing how to work and how to manage multiple things. So many things in life that people later thing as challenging, I knew how to balance all that. Now, there's a plus and a minus to that. So also in my sort of journey, I've also had to learn how to enjoy myself and how to relax and that there is more to life than just work and to take those moments, to enjoy those things and probably raising children was the biggest encourager of that because, in my mind, I couldn't do both of those things at the same time. So when I was with my son, I needed to be with my son, and when I was working, I needed to be working and being with my son created a...it was a way to observe a childhood that was more natural, say, than mine. I had a very good childhood, on one hand, but working at an early age did have an effect on me.

Blanche Touhill: It probably gave you a pride though, didn't it?

Kathy Osborn: Well, it did. At the time, I thought it was wonderful. I thought, oh, wow, I can work, and frankly, I worked at St. John's Mercy Hospital, there was a lot of young people there. I thought it was all lovely. It wasn't until many years later, when I kind of looked back and realized, well, I missed proms and I missed hanging out and I missed going to places after school. I mean, I missed some things but I didn't really see that until much, much later. At the time, it all seemed like, well, this is wonderful.

- Blanche Touhill: How did you get that job?
- Kathy Osborn: I don't remember but my mother, by that time, had gone to work and she was working at St. John's so it ended up being my mother working there, my sister, Peggy, my sister, Barbara and then ultimately Carol. So we all worked at St. John's and I think there was three or four of us there at the same time and essentially at that point, we were supporting the family. So we were living in a nice area. We were probably the poorest people in that area. So part of my script was, don't let people know that. Just act the part that you're going to St. Joe and, oh, you just like to work and everything is fine and we all sort of learned how to be good actresses.
- Blanche Touhill: You didn't work on the weekend though, did you?
- Kathy Osborn: I don't remember. That's a very good question. I don't remember.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, because if you worked 3:00 to 11:00, you might have...
- Kathy Osborn: Yeah, I don't know what my shifts were, yes. I don't remember that part. I don't remember also ever seeing a paycheck. I know I got a paycheck but at the time, we were committed to help support the family. Keeping the house, keep everybody going and everything moving along, and my mother did a great job. It was difficult. She did what she had to do and, looking back, I can see...just having raised one son, I can see how complicated it would be to have seven children, six of them girls, with all of their emotional and their ideas and their judgmentalism. So that was a challenge for her.
- Blanche Touhill: Was your brother the youngest?
- Kathy Osborn: He was in the middle. There were two younger than him. For a long time, I think I thought my parents were just going for a boy, but then Bobby came and then we had Carol and Patty as well, and Bobby was tremendous. Bobby was such a counteraction to the emotion of all the girls. Sports was his outlet. He was always gone, playing some sport somewhere, very, very bright. He had an aptitude for math and ended up being the valedictorian of his class of CBC, at St. Louis U and doing very, very well in the world of finance. But Bob was great because he could sort of settle everybody down. You know, "Oh, don't even...why are you worried about that? Just don't even think about it." I became very close to him in my adult life and, in fact, he was working for a family, when I

was here at University of Missouri-St. Louis, he was working for a very high net worth family who was very private and that same family was working with the university and Blanche Touhill on a very significant gift and we didn't really find out that we were working with the same family until much later.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, a lot of the very wealthy hid the fact that they were going to give this gift. A lot of them did like that.

Kathy Osborn: That's exactly right.

Blanche Touhill: It was Des Lee. I didn't meet Des Lee for three months, into the negotiations.

Kathy Osborn: That is true. That's right; that's exactly right.

Blanche Touhill: All I knew, it was a wealthy philanthropist and then they surfaced.

Kathy Osborn: That's right.

Blanche Touhill: When you were in high school, I know you ranked very high in class. Were you the valedictorian?

Kathy Osborn: No, I was not. I don't believe so.

Blanche Touhill: But you got the curator scholarship to the University of Missouri.

Kathy Osborn: I did, I got the curator scholarship.

Blanche Touhill: Which is a very prestigious award.

Kathy Osborn: Yeah, University of Missouri-St. Louis, was very smart at the time. I don't know this was their thinking but they thought, bright kids, parochial school, lots of children, hey, a scholarship could make a difference. And I got a scholarship here and I also got a scholarship to Boston College where I really wanted to go in public relations and at the time, you didn't take out loans. You either had the money or you didn't. So I got the scholarship but not for dorms. Well, I couldn't go. There was no way I could find the finances to be able to do that. So I got the scholarship here, so I went on a grand adventure. So I was part of those early classes that came out here when they were building and everything was muddy but what they had from the get-go here was great professors. They had the best, East and West Coast professors. So right away you had very

interesting faculty members with very different ideas, top in their field and you had them in the classroom whereas a lot of more traditional universities, you might have had, particularly in your freshman/sophomore year, TA. Here you had the people who were top of their field.

Blanche Touhill: Arnold Groneman once said that it was probably one of the best educations in the Midwest because the doctoral faculty taught the freshmen/sophomore/junior/seniors because we didn't have much of a graduate program.

Kathy Osborn: Yes, I think that's absolutely true.

Blanche Touhill: And they were all waiting for the graduate programs to be developed but in the meantime, where you would get a TA at a large university in your freshman/sophomore year, you got the real thing UMSL.

Kathy Osborn: That is right and I think there was that bringing together of those really bright, relatively young faculty members with this new population of people that are really coming for an experiment. I didn't know what I was doing. I had to get a map out. I didn't know how it was going. I really actually didn't have a context, that it had just opened, say, in the last 10 years. So we all came out here on scholarship or because it was something we were attracted to and most people worked. So it became an environment where I think you had a disproportionate number of very bright people who also had a realism about life and I think you combined those two things with a good education, and what I'm seeing is now people of my age, they're running all kinds of things, not only in St. Louis but around the world. So something was happening here between the kind of students that were attracted and the kind of education they got that has made, certainly St. Louis, a much stronger place.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have a major in mind when you came?

Kathy Osborn: You know, it was the late '60s, early '70s and so that was a time of a lot of turmoil. Washington University, for instance, was really a hotbed of radical sociologists and others. So at the time, as a young person, I was really attracted to what's really going on in our world; what is my role. I'd always had a sense of mission, about helping the underserved, about inner city issues, about diversity. It was always kind of on my mind. So I

think the public policy center here and the Metropol...it was called something...

Blanche Touhill: Metropolitan...

Kathy Osborn: ...Center or something that they had that worked with inner city. I did some work there. So that really intrigued me.

Blanche Touhill: Norton Long was the...

Kathy Osborn: Yes, and at the same time that that was going on, sociology was a big deal. That was a time when you had really great people across the country in sociology, some of the best thinkers in our society but a lot of them are also attached with this change and maybe being sort of radical, et cetera, et cetera. So over the years, sociology sort of drifted away but at the time, it was really the place to be for somebody like myself that wanted to do something and wanted to learn, how do systems work; how do people interact. So it became a place, for me...and then there was heavy connections with Wash U and kind of my funny story I tell is, I remember being on the quadrangle here and it was kind of a demonstration. People were talking and we were sitting around and I had my books and I remember, it was all the Wash U people who were really handling our protest because at 3:00 o'clock...2:30, I had to go to work so you had limited time to protest. So what it really meant is, you know, you were into the world of ideas but you also were like, "I got to go to work because I got to fund this." And in retrospect, that isn't a bad place to be in a time of turmoil because it keeps you a little with one foot in the ground and I talked to many people my age who had gone to universities where you had the luxury of living in the dorm and mom and dad were paying for it. You didn't have to worry about anything. There was no jobs and it was a rough time for them because they got off on a lot of ideas and they still look back at their universities in negative ways because they see that that was a time of a lot of turmoil. So they kind of missed out in a way.

Blanche Touhill: Did you still keep your job at the hospital or did you go someplace else?

Kathy Osborn: For most of my education, I was at the hospital. I thought about becoming a doctor and that just was never my calling. Then towards the end I remember I took several other jobs. At one time, I had two jobs at the same time. Being one of seven and with financial adversity hitting my

family...and that was still going on...I mean, I was on my own, so whether that was figuring out how to...I had a little VW bug which was constantly broken. I was constantly driving to things. I had to have a spatula to get the ice off the thing. But there was no calling my mother and saying, "I need money to fix my car." So financial imperative is a theme throughout my life and, again, you can look at it through two lenses but it does make me highly financially responsible but I had to deal with a lot of that insecurity that comes with never having, really, a Plan B. There wasn't a Plan B. I had to figure out that plan.

Blanche Touhill: When you got to college, how did you determine a major then?

Kathy Osborn: You know, I don't remember. I can only remember that very quickly I gravitated towards sociology and I will tell you that my second year here, I was recruited at Washington University and they gave me a full scholarship, put a big push that I would come. Now, whether they were doing that with other people here, I don't know. I've never talked to anybody to ask. And I went to Washington University for one year and I loved it. I had probably the best course and the best teacher I've ever had. It was the philosophy of religion and what that did for me is just opened up the world of ideas in a very dramatic way. But I'll tell you what didn't work: at the time, Wash U was going through a lot of turmoil and it affected a lot of majors and a lot of students. You were taught by TAs. I had been used to being taught by the best. And also, people were all out in the quadrangle, protesting. They weren't going to the classes. They weren't doing that and it quickly became clear to me I didn't fit in here. I loved some parts of it but I really didn't fit in because I didn't have the time for what was going on and I couldn't find my way. Now, at the time, there was a lot of cross-faculty, particularly in sociology and there was a faculty member here who ultimately ran the department here who became, really, a good mentor. He was the person who said, "You ought to go further in sociology. You ought to get an assistantship" and that kind of thing.

Blanche Touhill: And get a graduate degree?

Kathy Osborn: And get a graduate degree, et cetera. But truthfully, my path kept winding. You know, it's funny about life: you sort of set your path and then sometimes you get off in other directions. So I went off into teaching and wanted to teach disadvantaged children but ironically,

when I was younger, for whatever reason, I wanted to do marketing and nobody was doing marketing. I don't know why I thought that but ironically, as my career moved along, I came to understand I could do more work not directly working with people, but raising the money and helping to oversee programs that would help society. So my skills just blossomed in that area.

Blanche Touhill: Did you take marketing courses?

Kathy Osborn: No, not at all. What I did is I went to people who were in the field and said, "Tell me how you write a press release; how do you do those things?" Joined organizations where I could learn all those skills, fundraising. I came up in the era of fundraising when there wasn't fundraising. I worked for an organization called Life Skills Foundation, newly opened to take developmentally disabled children out of institutions. I mean, it's hard for us to imagine now, parents, everybody put their children in institutions, and frankly, not that great of institutions. They didn't know that but that's what was available then. Then there was a movement to bring people out of institutions. So I was on the front end of that. And it was in that era where I was working on program issues because that's what I had been trained to do and I realized, they don't have any money. They got to get money. And I began to learn how to raise money, how to work with the board, how to work for volunteers and that sort of cemented: this is a gift; go with this.

Blanche Touhill: Is Life Skills still operational?

Kathy Osborn: It is.

Blanche Touhill: Does it have a different name?

Kathy Osborn: I don't think so. I think it's still called Life Skills Foundation. Wendy...

Blanche Touhill: Yes...Warner Sullivan's daughter.

Kathy Osborn: ...who I used to work with, she came in as an employee when I was there and she went up and she's now head of the program.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you were head of the program?

Kathy Osborn: I was never head of Life Skills Foundation. I was over all their administrative functions and the gift that I had was, I can work with a lot

of different people and I really understood, I don't know why...my goal was to do something to serve people, have a purpose, do something to make this a better place and so I did a lot of that right in the community. Then I figured out, why don't I try to bring people who have got some assets to the table and we can do more if we can get some finances. So pretty quickly I learned how to work with people. Life Skills was interesting because it was started by Jewish individuals who had handicapped children and their friends, and a lot of them just happened to have means. Some of them didn't but a lot of them did. So the Jewish community was a heavy supporter. So it was there that I learned about how generous Jewish people are, how that generosity for them gets reflected in their lifetime. So giving is part of their whole persona and, frankly, they're just absolutely fabulously marvelous people. So, I was able there to really learn how to do it in a setting where nobody else knew. There wasn't any place to go. Nobody was doing that in small non-profits at the time.

Blanche Touhill:

I don't think the public institutions were doing it at all.

Kathy Osborn:

They weren't at all.

Blanche Touhill:

Because there was a stricture against public institutions raising money.

Kathy Osborn:

That's exactly right.

Blanche Touhill:

And I'm not sure Washington U raised a lot of money...or St. Louis U in those days.

Kathy Osborn:

You know, I think you're right. I mean, I think institutions like St. Louis U and like Washington U probably depended upon tuition income and, frankly, parent giving. I suspect the more traditional schools, they would have parents who would give to the schools and I think, when I came to the University of Missouri-St. Louis, as far as I can remember, there was very little fundraising and, in fact, there was a bit of a prohibition. It's a little bit like lawyers advertise now but back in the day, no good lawyer would ever do that. It just wouldn't be done.

Blanche Touhill:

Actually, the university didn't market. They made announcements.

Kathy Osborn:

Ah.

Blanche Touhill:

They were forbidden to market.

Kathy Osborn: Well, that's so interesting because what I can remember about Blanche Touhill and the role...she had so many roles in my life but she was an unusual change agent. If you talked with her and met with her, she seemed so gracious. I've never heard her raise her voice in the whole time I knew her but she was a change agent and as she tried to change the marketing department here and the admissions department because at the time, there were so many people wanting to come to institutions like University of Missouri-St. Louis, you didn't have to market. You really had to set up criteria and say, you have to be this smart and you have to come with this resources and, okay, you can come in. But that all changed, of course, and we had to look at that differently and some people got with that program and some people didn't get, and what I saw was Blanche Touhill working with people, encouraging them to get...the terminology today is "get on the right bus," you know, there's only one bus going here, and if they didn't, then somebody had to have the hard conversation, that this was not going to be the right place. So ironically, I'm not sure she set out to be the revolutionary, she ended up being, but it had to happen because the institution had to change and so for me, I ended up again at a place where change was occurring. For the first time, I had to realize some things, number one, I'm not just a hard worker; I'm not just an organized worker, but I can be very creative. I can be flexible. I can see what the future is going to be and go with it as opposed to resist it. So, for the first time, I started seeing myself in a different light than I had previously seen myself.

Blanche Touhill: Was it fun?

Kathy Osborn: Oh, it was so much fun and, you know, universities are very complex places to work and for me, I came in at one level and I rose to another level and there were pluses and minuses to all that. I will tell you that when I came in as, I think, director of alumni relations, they had all the deans at the time interview me and what happened is, every dean said, "I voted for you. You were my person," and their sense of...like, they had an investment in me, paid off really throughout my career here. Now ironically, when I ultimately became vice chancellor, I also learned another lesson...and hopefully not true for women today; a little bit true for women then...it's sort of like, the further up you go...it's easy when you're just the worker bee. The further up you go, you do have resistance in certain places from people and I remember Blanche saying, "Oh, Kathy,

it's because they think they could do your job but you're doing the job." So now those relationships are far more complex. And, I will say that I think I developed a unique skill set. One is, I can get things done; I could do it, but by golly, by gee, I know how to work with people and I figured that out. I figured out how to...that an English professor thinks very differently than a business professor, and I would even dress differently and it was all sincere; it wasn't made up, but I just knew they thought differently about issues than, say, the physicist. I mean, I'll never forget my first alumni reception for the physicists and they brought, like, three six-packs of beer and put it on the table with some chips and said, "Let's have a party" and that was their comfort level. That casualness was who that group was, whereas obviously with the business group, it's a very, very different kind of thing, had to be more organized, et cetera. My sociology background has come into play throughout my life because at the end of the day, you've got to figure out how to organize a room, how to have the right amount of people. I mean, think about it: If you're coming to an important meeting and there's supposed to be 100 people and 10 people are there, if you don't orchestrate that room in the right way, the 10 that are there are thinking to themselves, "Maybe I don't need to be at this meeting." So it was very important to figure out who spoke, the diversity...for whatever reason, and I don't know where this came from, maybe it was just the era I grew up in, this idea of diversity of thinking and, of course, in St. Louis, it was more diversity around African Americans and that was always something in my mind. I remember the first time I met with the...we put together an African American chapter of the Alumni Association and what I proposed, I just put some African American alumni...I knew none of them...together. We met evening after evening. I remember thinking, does anybody know that it's 9:30 and I'm still sitting in this room meeting with these people? And what happened is, their perception of the campus...at the same time I was here, for many of them, was in racist terms and I would say, "Oh, no, I had the same thing; oh, yeah, I had to stay in that line; oh, yeah, oh, yeah, I didn't get a parking place either," but I had to realize, let it go because their perception is as real as your perception. So it became a life-long understanding that my job wasn't to talk an African American alum into, that there was no race in their experience. Mine was to understand that they saw it, why did they see it, and then to figure out a way, how do we move forward in a constructive way. And until I figured that out, we really

weren't moving forward. Once we all kind of figured it out, we became friends. I have life-long friends from that group because we have mutual respect of who we are.

Blanche Touhill: I remember that was a very controversial move.

Kathy Osborn: It was.

Blanche Touhill: But it lasted.

Kathy Osborn: It lasted, and what I said is, "Do you want to be part of the whole or do you want to be a separate chapter?" and you had people with both voices but at the time, there was more voices saying, "Okay, we want to have a seat at the big table but we want our own chapter," and that was a wise move and it worked well for the university because we were able to bring in a wider net and then those people, at the same time, could see, "Gee, I don't want to just be president of the African American chapter, I could be president of the overall chapter." I think that certainly at the time, it served to heal a lot of people's emotions and feelings and then, ironically, things happened. We had an African American chancellor that nowadays nobody understands that was huge to have, and she was an African American chancellor that was this very openly radical change agent. She was going to make things happen tomorrow and that really changed a lot of things for a lot of us and then when Blanche Touhill came along, she took that legacy and then built the institution for the future.

Blanche Touhill: You really helped create the Alumni Association because prior to that time, we always had sort of an Alumni Association but it was mainly the College of Business.

Kathy Osborn: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Did you know that when you came?

Kathy Osborn: Yes. I knew you had a problem and at the time, there were two jobs that I was a finalist in that wanted me. One was a job as St. Joseph's Hospital in Kirkwood and at the time, hospital fundraising...that's where fundraising occurred really; that was the big place to go. So if you went to a hospital, you were really moving along. And then this job at UMSL and even then, I envisioned myself in my really lovely office, because it would have been a

lovely office at St. Joseph's Hospital; it would have been a lovely mission, but I always imagined it very neat and orderly. And then over here you had this huge problem: alumni were not connected; you didn't know the key to it; you knew the numbers were there. Something really attracted me. Now, to show you how naive you can be, I didn't know that an interim vice chancellor hired me. Nobody would take a job from an interim anything, but I did.

Blanche Touhill: Was that McKinney?

Kathy Osborn: It was Dennis Verity.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, I remember Dennis, yes.

Kathy Osborn: So, I never looked to see where my office was going to be. They interviewed me over at the Alumni House. So I didn't ask many questions and I can remember showing up for my job, all eager, ready to go and I had a little office and I was so excited and I walked out of my office and I said to a lady who was sitting there, "Would you do this letter?" and she said, "Well, I'm going to tell you a couple things: number one, you don't have a secretary; number two, we have no paper so you have to get approval for paper" and I remember going back into my little office...do you know what I'm saying...and saying, oh, my goodness, because at the time, the university was like in slow motion. Everything was going slow and you had a lot of people that were from a past era and we were yet to come forward. So, what I really had to do was figure it out for myself in a highly complex political situation. I learned so many things at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, but one of the things that has stayed with me to this day is, I grew up. My innocence left. I understood politics. You cannot survive in a university...I remember one of our corporate donors saying, "Wow, we thought we had politics" and it's not just University of Missouri-St. Louis. University politics are complicated, you've got to understand them, you've got to learn how to work within them, and at the time, I was probably here about 14 years and we had three or four chancellors and the one that was there the longest was Blanche Touhill and I learned how important it is longevity can be. But I had to survive. How do you survive when things are changing all the time? So, that was a huge learning experience for me. So what I did with the alumni is...and it was a sacrifice. I mean, looking back, I worked day and night and I knew it was about people. I had to understand the chairs

of the departments. None of them had been approached before. Most of them thought administration was useless. So I had to bridge relationships with them to figure out the mindset of their alums and then I just had to show up at all their things...show up, show up, show up. Provide extra money from here and there; make speeches late at night; do whatever they wanted me to do and, out of that, I began to develop relationships and out of that, we came up with chapter ideas. So you didn't have to be a chemistry graduate and all of a sudden go to this big Alumni Association. You could be part of the chemistry chapter. And I think all of us began to see that there were some very smart, capable people coming along the pipeline. Now, most of them were still director of, partner in, vice president of, assistant superintendent, but you could see the future, that this group of people was all of a sudden going to be popping into positions.

Blanche Touhill: Have you met them later in your current position?

Kathy Osborn: Oh, all the time, all the time, and I'll give you an example of Warner Baxter: He's somebody I knew from the business school here and got him involved in a number of things. To me, Warner is another great example of people like myself, came to a school, worked hard, relatively humble and unassuming, just bright as he could be, got this job, moved up the chain of the command, one thing at a time. I don't think anybody who hired Warner said, "Someday he's going to be the chairman of this company" but he did it, one rung at a time and I think the foundation was two things: darned smart. You have to be smart in most cases to get things done but he had some kind of a people skill because, again, if you're working at the same time you're going to school, you've got to figure out some things about life. Realism can pay off in the jobs. So it's been wonderful for me to have what I consider to be a fabulous position now and work with CEOs of major companies and one of the first people I called when I started the RBC was Pete Genovicki, who was the chairman of UMB at the time and we didn't fully understand Pete's role in that company. He was really an advisor to the Kemper family. They heavily depended on him. He spent a good amount of time in Kansas City because he was really a thought leader for the entire company. We saw him as leading the St. Louis region but he really had a much more complicated position and he's still active and involved, retired now. I know he and his wife, Claire, very, very well.

Blanche Touhill: The one thing I remember about your alumni meetings, you used to have them in the companies.

Kathy Osborn: Yes, that's exactly right. That's exactly right. I forgot about that. We would start to go to companies and here's why that was important: There was a gentleman, now passed away, I believe, Walter Gray at Mercantile at the time, really a fine person, came on the chancellor's council, just a lovely person, loved the institution but we kind of found out something. At the bank, they were hiring and giving scholarship money to...I don't know which school but I want to say Yale and Princeton and Stanford and Dartmouth, and they never looked at where their employees were coming from, really, and so when you had an event at Mercantile...and all these smart Mercantile employees who were UMSL grads, came forward, all of a sudden the company realized, "Oh, my goodness" and Walter became, as I remember it, that pivotal person from..."Oh, we recruit from these schools" to "Oh, University of Missouri-St. Louis, we need to pay more attention; we need to recruit there more actively; we need to give them scholarship money" et cetera. So the corporate events brought our people in but it also showed the company that something's happening in your company and you don't know it and I think today it's accepted. It's very accepted in most of the major companies. They understand that.

Blanche Touhill: So then you became vice chancellor.

Kathy Osborn: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Why did you apply for the job?

Kathy Osborn: Well, here's what the interesting thing is: I didn't just go from the director of Alumni Relations to there. There were steps along the way and I developed a habit which I see now very few people do but people who have worked for me have done this: I would say, this doesn't seem to be going very well and I'm not sure this is going to get done this way and I've got an idea. Here's the plan: I'll just do it. So I got promotions in reverse. So I had to do the job, in addition to my other job, until somebody could figure out, "That's a big job," and then I would get a new title and then we would hire somebody else to do that other job. And it was all in the context of changing chancellors, and I'm not a particularly brave person so I had to overcome a lot of fear, but for example, I figured out, okay, they're firing my boss soon. He just gave me...they called it

“reclassification”...huh? Maybe I better check it out with the chancellor to see, are they okay. And so I would just send a note saying, “Chancellor Barnett, I’ve been asked to do this position but it’s going to be so close to what you’re doing, let me know, do you think that’s a good idea” and each time they’d put a little thing back, “Of course, take the position.” So it developed, for me, a bit of a sophistication about, you can be the hardest worker known to man and if you can’t figure out the politics in certain organizations, it won’t go. And I had the dual package. I could do it and I could figure out...now, not all the time. It’s complicated, but I at least was able to work through most of the land mines and I think that paid off when Blanche Touhill...Chancellor Burnett set the stage but it was Blanche Touhill who had to change the institution for the future and I think the fact that I learned, first off, even though I learned politics, I’m a person of great integrity so I don’t lie; I don’t tell you things that aren’t true; I don’t tell one person something and tell the other person something else. So I really did figure out, okay, I have a good relationship with Al Barton in the chemistry department. How can we work together to build for the future, even though he may be upset about what he might perceive or his department might perceive as a threat. So what happened for me is actually somebody came down the hall and said, “Listen, your boss is going. We’d like you to be interim” and I very distinctly remember the person saying, “Oh, by the way, we don’t see you as a candidate for the job. We just want you to do this job,” and I really didn’t take much offense. Do you know what I’m saying? I mean, sometimes in life...women are really...I can see this now because I grab things more now...but women traditionally...there’s all kinds of books...we don’t see the next step, even when somebody says, “Here it is,” we say, “Oh, no, I couldn’t do that.” So at the time, I didn’t take a great offense, but here’s what happened: It was the key years of turmoil. The budgets crashed. Change had to happen. Enrollment wasn’t so easy anymore and all of a sudden we had this tremendous campus-wide, how we’re going to cut the budget process and I looked at my little budget and my little group of people and I realized two things: First off, I can take the easy way and just sort of cut it willy-nilly and hope for the best, or I can say, what do I think this thing has to look like for the future? So I spent night after night after night at home figuring out, what are the key components of where we’ve got to go; what do I need; what do I don’t need anymore; how am I going to get there. And what happened is, and

then we had to begin to implement it. So they then began to interview vice chancellors and they flew in people and I was paying out of University Relations to fly them in and I was just doing my job. It was probably one of the better...in terms of staying out of the politics of it...and then they came down the hall one day and they said, "You're the person. We want you to take this job. So stay right where you are because we want you to take this job," and by then I knew I absolutely could do the job. It was a hard era though. It was an era...change is hard because it's change for the people also that report to you and that can be difficult. People can be very...I think particularly then...hopefully most people understand now, you've got to move quickly with change and if you can't do that...back then, there was a lot of people could resist change, so it was hard to manage all that with integrity. Also, frankly, we had to move quickly and so all of a sudden I ended up with a unit that probably before that time looked like this and then all of a sudden there were this many functions because people knew I could manage things and I could manage them and I could bring in budget on budget, I could be honest about it. I could say, "Hey, you know what? Here's this position. I can do without it. Take it. Do what you need to do with the faculty." So I ultimately got the job and I will tell you, it was an exhausting period getting it and the next few years in many ways were exhausting but tremendously rewarding because here was the concept: You took a person like myself, and at the time, the person like Blanche Touhill, and probably if they would have done our profile and said, these are the two least likely aggressive fundraisers you're ever going to meet, you put us together, we knew what we needed to do and we worked out of that in a way that you couldn't do if you were selling hairbrushes. We knew kids needed this and I think we went at this in a very determined way. The fun part of it was, is all the fun things happen when you really are running by the seat of your pants. We had no research department. We didn't have a huge development office. We would just say, Anheuser Busch, and oh, my heavens, we have a relationship with this person, and oh, my heavens, they're international. And so a lot of it was a creative process. And I remember one day being down at Anheuser Busch and it was in a snowstorm and the chancellor at the time, she loved to drive, so that was the other thing. Here you got the chancellor...nowadays, chancellors don't drive. Somebody drives them. She's driving, it's in a snowstorm. Neither one of us ever wore coats so here we are, these two young

women, no coats, it's a snowstorm. We're downtown. Anyway, we get in there, just all disheveled. We get into the room and of course if anybody knows...at the time, fundraising from Anheuser Busch was an intense experience. We went right to the top, sat at the desk, got ourselves together and we were talking about the project and the next thing you know, the person said, "We're actually not interested in..."...whatever the country was, and I remember very distinctly pulling another proposal out of my briefcase, putting it in front of the chancellor and then we talked about something the company was interested in. So we learned a lot. It was very stressful. We worked a lot of long hours but there was a team there and we trusted each other. It was not easy. There was a lot of politics. Not everybody on the campus was happy and for me, particularly, I'm a people pleaser. I want everybody to be happy and I learned from Blanche Touhill a couple things, which have served me well. Number one; don't always let your face tell the story. So sometimes you don't need to tell everybody that you're happy, you're sad, you're mad; two, you don't always have to be the first person to raise your hand, that maybe this isn't something that you're destined to fix. Maybe somebody else ought to do that; and third, she had a capacity to take criticism and not integrate it. She just took it for what it was in an objective, analytical way and then she dealt with that. She disarmed people in a very different way than most leaders do. Most leaders, we say, "Oh, as soon as Bill Clinton came in the room, you knew he was going to be the president," from a very young age, you knew he was going to be a Rhodes scholar, but Blanche was the kind of a person who could come in a room and you may not say that and then you'd realize she knew everybody in the room and everybody in the room trusted her and that's why I'm convinced she ended up being on so many corporate boards, because people said, "This is a smart woman. We need that but also, she's a person who I can get along with. She'll fit in well with what we're trying to do here." So I've learned now, with RBC, it's not about me. It's about the 100 people I represent and the causes we're going to do. So I don't worry one bit about publicity. I don't seek it; I don't want it, and it's been terribly freeing because, truthfully, people know that I'm running a significant organization, that we created it from nothing, that we're doing wonderful things for St. Louis but it's not about Kathy. It will survive many decades and decades beyond me.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about your organization, how it got started.

Kathy Osborn: Yeah. You know, there was a gentleman, Dez Lee, who I got to know at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and when you do this kind of work, you have to have certain boundaries. In other words, you work with rich people but you're not a rich person, and to pretend to be so is phony. But you get to know them and respect them but there are certain boundaries. But I will tell you, with Dez Lee, and maybe it was because of the maturity too, I'd gone through a lot in my career and I was in a position of authority, where the professional and personal came together and he had a vision that we would have an expanded business leadership with companies like he represented, the company he sold, Lee Rowen, which was a mid-cap company and that was his vision and he, at the time, had hopes that progress would expand. His wife's son headed up Enterprise Rent-A-Car and was the head of civic progress and Andy Thiel at the time said, "We're about the right kind of number and we operate within a certain comfort level but we need more business involvement. We've got a problem in St. Louis. We've missed that whole tier of family-owned companies and privately held companies and publicly held companies that are headquartered here," and he had a vision. He announced that to the community. Somebody came to me and said, "We think you're the ideal person to do it," and, frankly, I knew I could. I knew the time was right. I could see that and I remember thinking about doing that and Desi saying, "You can't. Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, I need you here at University of Missouri-St. Louis" and I remember going in to see him and saying, "Desi, here's the deal. You challenge the community to do it. Somebody asked me to do it. I think I can do it. Now, come on," but then I said, "If this will sever our friendship, it's not worth it to me. If this means it's over, it's just not worth it," and he stood up and he said...and only Desi could say, "Kathy, baby, Kathy, baby, of course I'm with you" and actually made a first gift to help underwrite getting it started.

Blanche Touhill: And what do they do?

Kathy Osborn: What the RBC was set up to do is bring together a group of business leaders who were CEOs of their companies who previously had not been engaged whose companies were of size. We represent about 150,000 employees now, mostly all of them are headquartered here, so the decision makers, and bring them into the fold of civic leadership. So we act on high impact business, civic and philanthropic affairs. You might see

us supporting more funds for infrastructure. We're heavily into ed reform.

Blanche Touhill: I know you're into Ferguson.

Kathy Osborn: We are very much so. We're a little different than most organizations. We work behind the scenes. I have no PR person. We don't need a PR. We have a very small staff by design. We have four people. We wanted to have a war chest, money we could put on things. Here's what we knew: you need the smarts but you need the money to get things done. So everything we do, we have an engaged membership and that's the difference. Most organizations have an executive director, president and they go out and do. I have 100 people who go out and represent and then we have money they can bring along with them.

Blanche Touhill: And they each have an area?

Kathy Osborn: They do, they each have an area. We have five basic buckets, K-12 reform, talent development, business diversity, quality of life and then something called governance which is where we put business friendly and public policy and infrastructure but also regional government. So we've been a big player in this issue of governments getting along. We have no opinion on city and county merger. We have so many issues to decide in the county that for a long time I felt, we've got to figure out how all these municipalities and all these police departments and all these courts need to be better managed. So when Ferguson came along, I watched, as we all did, the TV for that first couple of days and two things kicked in: number one, I know those communities from University of Missouri-St. Louis. I understand those communities and I understand the silent pressure that I think they didn't even realize was happening over a period of time and it's well documented now that suburban areas across the country are now seeing the same kind of problems that traditionally urban areas saw, but they have none of the tools to deal with it because they're set up for a suburban kind of environment. But I saw that and I saw what was happening, I knew, number one, our lane was not policing. There was nothing I could do. That was legal; it was up to the lawyers to do what they were going to do. I couldn't solve that but what I could do is relieve the pain in the eyes of those business people whose businesses were looted and, number two, help to get those school kids back to school. They were not in school and those teachers were afraid to go to

school. So it was a tremendous time of turmoil right when school was starting. So I decided to set up a fund, called five people, said, "Let's all put some money in," called up North County Inc., had not talked to North County Inc. in 15 years, knew it was a solid North County organization, called the person up and said, "Here's who I am," she said, "Oh, I know who you are." I said, "Well, great because, guess what? I want to set up a fund there." And we set the fund up there, we announced it within four days and within three weeks we had money directly in the hands of those small businesses and it's a sad story today because we've now given money to 20 small businesses. Now, eventually I knew the big money, the public money would step in, and it has but for those small businesses initially, everything was taken. Their cash register was taken. All their paperwork was taken. Their inventory was taken. Their windows were knocked out and, of the 20 businesses, 1 is white, 2 are Asian, the rest are African American. They all were eking out a business there. They were all dedicated to their community, whatever their little business was, that's what they did: the nail salon; the hair salon; the little burger place; the little pizza place. That's what they did...the insurance broker; the cell phone person. So what RBC was able to do is act quickly in an area we knew we could as opposed to getting into things like, "Oh, was it the police or what happened?" That will all be decided in due time but we decided to help with the point of most need.

Blanche Touhill: And how did you help the school children?

Kathy Osborn: What we did with the schools, I went to four superintendents of four districts and said, "What do you need?" Two of them, Riverview Gardens and Normandy needed security. They could not have any evening events because they had no security budget anymore. So we gave them \$10,000 each and here's the irony: if you run a big district and all your money is tied up, \$10,000 is a lot. So they did security. The other two districts wanted things like, in the Jennings District, they had actually windows blown out of their alternative high school. We put windows in. We paid for lunches for the teachers to come to school. We paid to have professionals come in and teach them about diversity and trauma and traumatizing kids. We paid to bring in people into those schools to do that. We paid for Saturday programs. So it was all relatively small amounts. Each got \$10,000 and I said, "I'm trusting you. I'll want a little report later but you put it exactly where you need it." Well, they couldn't

believe it. So we're now working on our second round and they made a decision. I'm meeting with them next week that they're going to tell me what they see coming but we're going to kind of wait for this period of civil unrest, which is expected sometime in the next month or two, and then after that, you know, St. Louis is resilient. We'll do what we have to do. We'll hear voices we haven't heard. We'll deal with problems that we haven't dealt with. But we'll do it.

Blanche Touhill: And the organization is committed to keep folks in St. Louis.

Kathy Osborn: Absolutely. What we have really said now is...and the other thing that I did is there's five African American men and women who run significant organizations in town. I said to myself, they're the next generation of leaders. Support them. So Mike McNeil at the Urban League, "Mike, what do you need?" He says, "I'm going to have a job fair. I need \$5,000"; "Mike, here's \$5,000. Go do your job fair. What else do you need?"; "I need companies to go there," so we've worked with people like Brittany Packnett, Teach for America, and of course we knew Brittany Packnett's father, Ron Packnett, who would have been in the middle of this today but in a spiritual and peaceful, non-violent way. So we're working through them to see what needs to be done. At the same time, we've made it very clear to our legislators, something has to be done about the (missile?) court system and how it works, and secondly, something has to be done about our policing. It has nothing to do about the quality of police. It has to do with the multiple police departments, and frankly, the smaller the departments, the less able they are to accredit it. The larger departments go through all kinds of accreditation. Dan Isem who's a faculty member now at University of Missouri-St. Louis, now consultant to the governor, he puts it this way: It is his view, the more education a police officer has, the more likely, in a time of stress, they will be able to rely on all of that education in terms to kind of show them what alternative responses might be in a time where urgency and perhaps it's a life-threatening situation do. There are certain things the county executives need to do. We've got to work within the lane that we can.

Blanche Touhill: Would you answer three questions: What would your life be like if you had been born 50 years earlier? Was there an award or awards that you really do treasure, and just whatever other thoughts you have.

Kathy Osborn: Sure. I think if I was born 50 years earlier, I most likely would be a homemaker and perhaps a teacher. I think that women...as I progressed in my career, it was very clear to me that women...I needed to have a strong women's network and whether you're in higher ed...I mean, in my lifetime, there wasn't female chancellors or presidents. They were all males and the females were the wives of the presidents and chancellors. So it's been very important for me to have a network of women that I can count on, they can count on me, there's a strong degree of trust, and that we will watch each other's' back, so to speak, and that was something I didn't know when I was younger. I didn't feel I needed it and probably didn't at the time but I certainly do need it today. And then, the other part is, I got an award while I was vice chancellor, from the YWCA and it was a leadership award for education. It meant a lot to me. My identity was very tied up with the University of Missouri-St. Louis and education was a really driving force. It was important to me. So that award really, really was significant. And then when I moved to the business sector, about two years later, I got the Business Journal's Most Successful Influential Business Award and that was important to me because this was a whole new world, being in the business sector and that award had just been recently established and I think established because she realized that you need to over honor women and acknowledge their progression in the business world and that was terribly important to me.

Blanche Touhill: And how do you view the changes in women cooperating with one another over the years?

Kathy Osborn: You know, I think what people don't see is there's a quiet underground relationship among women, not all women. I don't get along with all men, nor do I get along with all women but you develop, particularly people who are in positions of authority, you really want them to do well and so to compete with them isn't the answer. To figure out how all boats rise is probably the best way to go. So for me...and I've also learned a woman can have a special role with other women who might report to her and I'll give you an example: One of the things that Blanche Touhill was notorious for is, in terms of compensation, she treated men and women equally. There was no men get this...and at the time, and still to this day probably it happens, but she had a fairness about her and if you were a woman in a position where there had been a man in that position, you were going to get paid on parody. So I think women have a sensitivity

to those issues and, you know, we don't talk in our society still a lot about that. Some people do but I've found a lot of people don't and I think how we've compensated is to develop that kind of silent network, where we're there through thick and thin so when somebody calls and says, "Who do you think would be good to be on this?" you say, "Oh, I think Maureen would be perfect for that." So I think that's where I've developed my strength and that's where I think I can see I can play an important role in terms of helping and supporting other women.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I want to thank you for this interview. It's been wonderful to talk to you and relive exciting moments.

Kathy Osborn: It was.

Blanche Touhill: Thank you very much.

Kathy Osborn: Thank you. Thanks everybody.