

**STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS**  
**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

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**SHU SIMON INTERVIEWED BY BLANCHE TOUHILL**

Blanche Touhill: I'd like you to introduce yourself, to give your name and what you do and then we'll talk about your background.

Shu Simon: Okay. My name is Shulama Simon. I'm commonly known as Shu and I am a member of the IWF and I'm a practicing lawyer in St. Louis.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk a little bit about your background: your parents, where you were born. Was there somebody in your family, siblings, cousins, grandparents who encouraged you along the path of education or to go out in the world and do what you wanted to do and was there an elementary school teacher? Can you talk about your early life?

Shu Simon: Sure. I'm one of six children, not all still living, but my parents made us very aware of the desire to be as best educated as we could be and I think that many of us stayed in school and took advantage of that dictate, perhaps beyond what we really needed to do. My father had a PhD in Semitics. He came to the United States in his early teens, not being able to speak any English at all and he very quickly learned English, went to high school and then matriculated at Harvard and was in the class of 1910. He went on then to get his Master's and PhD at the University of Pennsylvania. He came to St. Louis to be the head of the Hebrew schools here and supervised the Hebrew schools. He had some illnesses so he wound up really teaching just students who came to our home and he died when I was just 14. My mother was homemaker but we all knew how important it was to learn and to be the best we could be and to be sensitive to the needs of our community. We lived in the City of St. Louis. I went to Dozier School which was an elementary school and then went to high school at Blewett. Our fourth year, Blewett and Soldan were

combined and it was known briefly as Soldan-Blewett but of course the Blewett got dropped. I became aware of the scholarship possibilities. It was called, I think, seven college conferences. It was primarily the schools that admitted women and I applied and was accepted and then I selected Barnard because I had one sister who was getting her Master's from Columbia School of Social Work and a brother who was at the Jewish Theological Seminary so I focused on 116<sup>th</sup> and Broadway, behind the green gate. I majored in history and as I was finishing college, I was looking, what do you do with a Bachelor's Degree and I realized that I had to get some kind of further education and I considered going for my Master's in history and decided, however, without really knowing what I was doing, to apply to law school and I applied and I was accepted at Columbia University which was across the street and graduated from law school in 1956.

Blanche Touhill: When you went to Barnard, how was it to go to an all-girls school after you had gone through the St. Louis public schools that were all co-ed?

Shu Simon: It was great. While it was a school whose students were all female, there were plenty of Columbia men who took courses as we were able to do as well. There was not an official connection between Barnard and Columbia that I'm aware of so there were plenty of men, both on campus and in classes. Actually, having primarily women in the college made it very easy to run the class...it was an 8:00 o'clock class...at 7:58, wearing your pajamas with a jacket or a coat over it. So that was a benefit of not having to be concerned about too many men. But because of the availability of Columbia and being in New York City, I never felt that it was just for women but I do want to say one thing about it: perhaps the absence of many males in the classes, I think allowed us to be unhampered by a sense of competition or a sense of being restrained because of male influences or concerns about not wanting to be shown up by males.

Blanche Touhill: Now, did you stay in the dorm then in Barnard?

Shu Simon: Yes, I did.

Blanche Touhill: And how many girls were there roughly?

Shu Simon: It was maybe 750...800.

- Blanche Touhill: Did you feel a pang of sorrow when they merged with Columbia?
- Shu Simon: No, it never merged. What happened was...and I'm not sure, maybe it was in the early '90s...Columbia said to Barnard, "We want you to fully integrate as part of Columbia and if you choose not to, we are going to admit women to Columbia College," because up until that time, Columbia College was just for males and Barnard made what I feel was a correct decision and declined to do so and Columbia College now is co-ed and Barnard remains a school for females.
- Blanche Touhill: Do the students at Barnard, are they still allowed to go take classes and vice versa?
- Shu Simon: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And they have both survived?
- Shu Simon: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: So the Barnard degree still exists?
- Shu Simon: Oh, yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And is it strictly Arts & Science?
- Shu Simon: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And then if you want to go into business or something of that nature, you might transfer in your junior year or something of that nature?
- Shu Simon: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: I did not realize that Barnard was still existing.
- Shu Simon: Right, it does.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you like history in high school?
- Shu Simon: Yes, I did, history, political science and I'm not a science person and so in college, I took the minimal math and science courses but focused primarily on history and political science.
- Blanche Touhill: And at what point did you just...well, you went into the law school. Did you get a scholarship there too?

- Shu Simon: I had a little bit of a scholarship.
- Blanche Touhill: But you were going to work or something to make the rest of it?
- Shu Simon: Yes, I sponged off my mother. I will say this...and I did have some part-time jobs but tuition at both Barnard and Columbia were much less than they are now.
- Blanche Touhill: How did you like living in New York?
- Shu Simon: Well, I had never been out of St. Louis except to go to camp one summer up in Wisconsin and so I arrived in New York and the first night my sister and brother took me out to dinner and we were walking up Broadway and I turned around for something and somebody...and I won't attempt to mimic it...some New Yorker said, "Kid, why don't you look where you're going" and I was totally intimidated. That first semester, I'm not sure that I ventured beyond the immediate neighborhood of Barnard because my sister had an apartment on 115<sup>th</sup> Street and my brother was on 122<sup>nd</sup> Street so...
- Blanche Touhill: So that was your world?
- Shu Simon: Yeah, right. It was only really after they finished their programs that I learned how to use the subway, the buses, and everybody walked also. We had Riverside Park just down the block.
- Blanche Touhill: Was there much social life at Barnard?
- Shu Simon: Yes. Mainly it was the boys from Columbia.
- Blanche Touhill: Right. So you moved into the law school and how many women were in the law school?
- Shu Simon: You know, I don't specifically recall but it seems to me that there were around 20.
- Blanche Touhill: But in the total school?
- Shu Simon: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And then in your class, there would be three or four?
- Shu Simon: No, it was more than that.

- Blanche Touhill: Okay, so we'll say five or six.
- Shu Simon: No, there were 20 in our class, in my class so it was a larger...
- Blanche Touhill: And have they admitted women for years?
- Shu Simon: Yes, I think so.
- Blanche Touhill: So you didn't think anything of applying to the law school as far as a woman is concerned?
- Shu Simon: No.
- Blanche Touhill: Did they talk about that at all, that you were one of the few women to...
- Shu Simon: I don't recall that being a focus of attention, either by the school or by the students.
- Blanche Touhill: How many were in one class, 100 or...
- Shu Simon: Oh, it depended. You could be in a class that was maybe...I think the largest class was something a little under 100 and then when you got to electives, they were much smaller.
- Blanche Touhill: And so you liked the law?
- Shu Simon: Well, actually, I didn't like law school. I didn't like it at all and it was a pleasant surprise to me when I finally got a job that practicing was much more interesting and exciting than the coursework.
- Blanche Touhill: Actually, I've heard a lot of law students say that, that they went through it because they wanted to be lawyers but they were relieved when they really got into the profession and began to practice.
- Shu Simon: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: So you came back to St. Louis or did you stay in New York?
- Shu Simon: Well, I applied for certain job openings in New York and I will always remember, I went one place and the interviewer was saying that the last person they hired was first in his class in college and law school and this period and that period and I thought to myself, well, you're lucky and you're not going to choose me and I realized that I was going to have a very hard time finding a job in New York and I felt some sense of

obligation to come back to St. Louis for family reasons, always thinking that if I really wanted to, I could go back to New York. That hasn't happened except on many visits.

Blanche Touhill: So you came back to St. Louis and did you go into business for yourself or did you choose another...

Shu Simon: No, aside from my few efforts to find a job in New York and was confronted with the sense that they weren't really interested in hiring a woman, I really faced that problem in spades when I came back and looked for a job here in St. Louis.

Blanche Touhill: Roughly what year was that?

Shu Simon: It was the fall of '56 and I had...somebody, a professor at Columbia had, without my knowledge really or my prior knowledge, had written to a friend of his who was a partner at Lewis Rice and so I had an interview there. I got interviews but I was really confronted with...perhaps one would describe it as a bias against hiring a woman. A woman is not going to stay; a woman is going to get married and go off with their husband and that's not what we're interested in, and it took me several months to get a job and I did get a call from the firm that's now known as Husch-Blackwell, was then (Soffey?) and Jones and they found a need to hire someone and all of the students that they had wanted from the graduating classes locally were all taken and I was available "but don't expect to stay with us beyond the next year's graduating class" and I was so irritated by that that I was going to say "thanks but no thanks" and I was persuaded that that was a dumb response and so I started at Soffey & Jones in November of 1956.

Blanche Touhill: Did they give you cases to go to court or were you the research person?

Shu Simon: Well, that's an interesting point. They didn't have any space so I was upstairs in the library and I did mainly research but I started to do some work with Carol Donahue and Chris Donahue was a great believer in the sink or swim theory and just don't bother me too much; just get it done but if you really need to talk to me, of course, he was available. But, I guess, I had the feeling that I needed to show the firm that I was as competent as any male lawyer. And so I worked very hard and, of course, I wound up staying at what then became Husch, Eppenberger, Donahue, Elson & Cornfeld for about 34 years.

- Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness, and you became a partner?
- Shu Simon: Yes, I became a partner in 1963.
- Blanche Touhill: In '63, so that was early, wasn't it, when you consider that you started in November of '56 and you became a partner. Was it that you won the cases or that you were a case getter or what was it that...
- Shu Simon: I think it was because I worked very hard and I was carrying the load and seven years was about the length of time that any associate would have to wait until...
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, really? I didn't know that.
- Shu Simon: Yes, yes.
- Blanche Touhill: I thought that was early. I think there's some people who never make partner?
- Shu Simon: Well, that's true, that's true, and now, currently, it's longer than seven years.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, and I think now, you can be there seven years and then have to leave.
- Shu Simon: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: And a lot of it is getting the business.
- Shu Simon: Well, what I found was, because of the type of work that I was getting from Chris Donahue and I was spending most of my time working for him, and that was in issues of local government and real estate, so you develop...because you concentrate in that area...you develop...I hesitate to call it an expertise but...
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, you become known in the profession?
- Shu Simon: You become known and it's that that is the way that clients come to you or other lawyers refer clients to you and that's what happened.
- Blanche Touhill: And you went to court? You not only...
- Shu Simon: Oh, yes.
- Blanche Touhill: So you got a lot of experience in courts?

Shu Simon: Right, I did. I did. The firm was not hesitant in sending me to court and I never had the sense that any judge looked down at me because I was female. There were a few lawyers who tried to, I think, intimidate that, "You're just running interference for somebody else" and you learn to deal with that and not accept it. You're stuck with me!

Blanche Touhill: Was your mother proud of you?

Shu Simon: Yes, right.

Blanche Touhill: Do you know many languages?

Shu Simon: No, I'm terrible at languages. I took French in high school and a year of German in college and I continued Hebrew studies but I'm not good at...you have to speak very, very slowly in order for me to...

Blanche Touhill: Now, I know you by your reputation as being an advocate for women, particularly in personnel matters. So when did that enter your repertoire of...

Shu Simon: Well, I did represent some people who...there was a small law firm of women and they were separating and I worked with them so that there wasn't any remaining conflict there but I did...actually, there was an interesting matter that I handled that involved a suit by Mary Anne Sedey who was representing a woman who was not being hired because she was pregnant. She was not being hired by the court and...

Blanche Touhill: Were you representing the court?

Shu Simon: Yes, I represented the court.

Blanche Touhill: And how did that work out?

Shu Simon: Well, we tried it and I think it was in the federal court, Judge Phillipine. I think he had a hard time but he did come down on our side.

Blanche Touhill: Were you hired by the court or were you hired...

Shu Simon: By the court, right.

Blanche Touhill: Well, that was quite a responsibility.

Shu Simon: Well, I held my breath on that one.



Blanche Touhill: Did you?

Shu Simon: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: But most of them, you could tell how they were leaning, the judge was leaning or the jury?

Shu Simon: No, it was a non-jury...

Blanche Touhill: Were most of your cases non-jury?

Shu Simon: Virtually all of them and local government, right.

Blanche Touhill: So you know everybody in politics?

Shu Simon: No.

Blanche Touhill: But you know a lot of people?

Shu Simon: I did but I haven't been nearly as active in recent years.

Blanche Touhill: Now, did you stay at Husch for your...

Shu Simon: No, I was there, as I say, for almost 35 years and then I went to Rosenblum-Goldenhersh and was there for eight or so years as of counsel and then went with another firm and then I went just on my own and I now have a home office.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness.

Shu Simon: Well, the rent's a lot cheaper.

Blanche Touhill: But you're still practicing.

Shu Simon: I am. I am only doing work for essentially one client and that will go on forever and it's primarily in the field of real estate.

Blanche Touhill: So early on you focused on real estate and bankruptcies?

Shu Simon: And local government.

Blanche Touhill: And local government, and then you really became an expert and built your practice on it?

Shu Simon: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Well, now, you must know the real estate in St. Louis?

Shu Simon: It's a volatile area.

Blanche Touhill: Is it?

Shu Simon: Yeah but the work that I currently do is primarily within the boundaries of the Normandy School District.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my. Oh, my.

Shu Simon: Yes, and the focus is to provide funding for persons of low or low to moderate income to acquire homes in that area.

Blanche Touhill: Is this a philanthropist that's behind this?

Shu Simon: My client is a foundation.

Blanche Touhill: And that's their goal, to provide housing...

Shu Simon: Provide funding for...and we work to aid the corporation known as Beyond Housing.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes. And how are they doing?

Shu Simon: Well, as long as the foundation is willing to provide the funding...

Blanche Touhill: Are they focused in places other than Normandy? Are you free to say?

Shu Simon: Beyond Housing does have other areas but the work that I do...

Blanche Touhill: ...is Normandy.

Shu Simon: ...is within the boundaries of the Normandy School District.

Blanche Touhill: And that's a vast area because it includes Wellston now...

Shu Simon: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And then all those little municipalities...

Shu Simon: There are 24 municipalities. We call it the 24 One Initiative.

Blanche Touhill: What percentage of that housing stock is Beyond Housing? Do they go in and buy the house and fix it up?

Shu Simon: Sometimes, yes, or new homes have been built and sold.

Blanche Touhill: By developers?

Shu Simon: No...

Blanche Touhill: By Beyond Housing?

Shu Simon: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Did you ever think, when you were young, that you would be this real estate tsarina or whatever it is?

Shu Simon: No, I did not.

Blanche Touhill: And so what happens in the Normandy School District is going to be very important for Beyond Housing?

Shu Simon: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Or will it?

Shu Simon: Beyond Housing will continue to do what it has been doing for umpteen years now. What happens to the school district, of course, will be very important because one of our current projects is the purchase of some of the school buildings that are not being utilized.

Blanche Touhill: Of course.

Shu Simon: So, we're a little anxious as to what the state will do to the school district.

Blanche Touhill: Well, we had the commissioner of elementary and secondary in the other day.

Shu Simon: Oh, Chris Nicastro?

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and she didn't talk much about the Normandy Schools but I saw her on TV the other night when they had the big...did you go to the meeting?

Shu Simon: No, I did not go.

Blanche Touhill: So you love the law?

Shu Simon: Sometimes.

Blanche Touhill: And what happened to your brother and sister?

Shu Simon: Well, my brother became a rabbi and he passed away a few years ago but he lived in Chicago and my sister...the females in our family are heartier because the three of us are still around but two of my brothers are no longer alive.

Blanche Touhill: And does your sister live in St. Louis?

Shu Simon: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, isn't that wonderful. So she came back?

Shu Simon: She came back, right.

Blanche Touhill: And do you go to New York often?

Shu Simon: Pretty regularly. I'm still friendly with people that I knew from college.

Blanche Touhill: And are they living in New York or...

Shu Simon: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: They're in New York. So you have places to visit and friends?

Shu Simon: Oh, yes, yes.

Blanche Touhill: Isn't that wonderful. Do you still have friends from grade school and high school?

Shu Simon: I have a friend or friends from high school. I don't know anyone from Dozier School.

Blanche Touhill: Well, St. Louis is like that though. Every woman I'm talking to has friends from some elementary or the neighborhood or high school or college that they have maintained that close relationship.

Shu Simon: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Well, let me talk about: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what would your life be like?

Shu Simon: The answer is, I don't know but I think that if it's in the context of my being Jewish and what the Jewish community was in the 1880's, I am not sure that I would have been going to college and I think that in that era, I think I would have been subordinate to whoever I might have married.

- Blanche Touhill: And been a volunteer or something of that nature?
- Shu Simon: Yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: And would you talk about the International Women's Forum?
- Shu Simon: Well, I find it a very interesting organization because I think the diversity of its members is astounding and the quality of the people is really just very admirable and I may not be attuned to some of the members politically but you feel a sense of warmth from the group and I think that I came to it, I guess in the early '90s and by that time, I wasn't seeing the need for trying to use the organization for networking or any other way to advance my own situation. So I've just enjoyed the people and I ought to participate more.
- Blanche Touhill: Have you gotten any awards that you're really very proud of or touched you when you received them?
- Shu Simon: A few years ago, I did get an award that was, I guess it was sponsored by, not the bar association but the organization that produced legal newspapers and they make certain awards and so I was selected as the Lawyer of the Year.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful, for Missouri?
- Shu Simon: No, just here.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, St. Louis, for the St. Louis bar?
- Shu Simon: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, that's quite an honor because they only give one a year.
- Shu Simon: Well, they title them differently.
- Blanche Touhill: Yeah, but no, that was a great. I think the thing about the law is that the older you get, the more important you know it is.
- Shu Simon: Oh, yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And did that affect you as you were practicing?
- Shu Simon: Well, it has to. Without the Constitutional principles, we would have chaos.

- Blanche Touhill: When did women get to own property in the United States or in Missouri?
- Shu Simon: I don't know but I'll find out.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, I would like to know something. I know that it probably came to the West sooner than it came to the Midwest and the East but I think that was because there were so few women that they were prized more but I've often thought that women probably didn't own property until maybe...well, I won't even venture on that one.
- Shu Simon: I will definitely let you know.
- Blanche Touhill: Tell me something about Beyond Housing, how did that get started?
- Shu Simon: It's been in existence for about 40 years and I don't know that much about its origins but...
- Blanche Touhill: Has it made a difference?
- Shu Simon: Oh, definitely, definitely. The needs of individuals and families who, for whatever reason, have been excluded from what some of us regard as just a natural availability of decent, safe, sound housing or of facilities for educating our children are so great and I think that Beyond Housing has stepped up and is able to provide that help, individual by individual by family and the problems won't ever be solved totally but you need organizations like Beyond Housing to be duplicated all over the community in order to confront the pressing issues of the inequality of opportunity.
- Blanche Touhill: And so you're very interested in how the schools go because that's part and parcel of this local district and local schools?
- Shu Simon: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: Does Beyond Housing exist in other parts of the country?
- Shu Simon: There are...
- Blanche Touhill: ...other groups?
- Shu Simon: Right, right.

- Blanche Touhill: And how does it work? Does somebody just get on a list of being in need with the social services? How do you get your clientele?
- Shu Simon: They have facilities in the neighborhood.
- Blanche Touhill: So if you live there and you're having trouble with your rents or something...
- Shu Simon: They assist people who are in risk of foreclosure or who are in need of housing and they've been working with the cities in that area so they get known...
- Blanche Touhill: Then clients come to them?
- Shu Simon: Right, that's correct.
- Blanche Touhill: And say, "I'm looking for a place and I have a spouse and a child" or something?
- Shu Simon: Right, right.
- Blanche Touhill: And I suppose those people are on the free lunch, the children are on the free lunch?
- Shu Simon: Every possible benefit that is available is utilized.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you stumble onto this or was it just...
- Shu Simon: I was doing some work for a person who is associated with the foundation and when this came up in 2011, maybe a little earlier than that, I began to do some work for the foundation.
- Blanche Touhill: I don't want to know anything I shouldn't know about the Normandy problem but do you think it can be solved?
- Shu Simon: That's a huge unknown. Without the legislature stepping in and facing up to the funding issues for districts and without modifying the current statute that...
- Blanche Touhill: ...requires them to bus the children elsewhere and pay for...
- Shu Simon: To bus and pay for, right. So, what that really means is the school district that hasn't passed muster is being forced to pay other districts and the

remaining children in the school district are the ones who are really suffering.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and you know it would make a wonderful book. I hope somebody is following it.

Shu Simon: I'm sure it will.

Blanche Touhill: And I do hope somebody is following it and reading what is not only in the newspapers but going to the original sources, like going to the legislative hearings because it could be a prototype for the United States in trying to handle this education problem that we have and it can just go from county to county, school district to school district and you're in an interesting position. If you could write that in your spare time...no, I think that's for somebody sort of intimately involved. Well, you're intimately involved but you're on the real estate part more than...

Shu Simon: Right.

Blanche Touhill: You're an adjacent kind of thing.

Shu Simon: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Do you look back on your mother and give her credit for spurring you on and...

Shu Simon: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: ...your brother and sister?

Shu Simon: Right.