

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

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**JOYCE ABOUSSIE INTERVIEWED BY BLANCHE TOUHILL**

Blanche Touhill: Would you introduce yourself?

Joyce Aboussie: I am Joyce Aboussie from St. Louis, Missouri.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk a little bit about your youth and your parents or your siblings or your grandparents, your cousins and maybe your elementary school teachers or your high school. Did they encourage you? Did they say, "Joyce, you have ability. You should study hard and you will go far in what you want to do"?

Joyce Aboussie: It was interesting. So, I have, still, a great family. My parents have passed, unfortunately. We have a very, very close-knit family. My brother has passed, unfortunately, and I have two wonderful sisters. We're still very close. I had a great childhood. I have no complaints. We didn't have a lot of money. We lived in St. Joan of Arc Parish there on South St. Louis and Hampton and Oleatha and we ate dinner at 6:00 o'clock every night and we prayed at 6:00 o'clock every night and we were thankful for what we got and we were appreciative. When I was born, I was very fortunate because my father, at that time, had met a guy by the name of Danny Thomas that year, in 1957, who came and asked for help because he had a dream to build a hospital, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, and he asked my father if he would help him, and he went around to folks all throughout the nation and my father helped Danny Thomas and, in fact, my father was on the first board of directors of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital at its founding. So, to say that I grew up with St. Jude is an understatement. It has been a fabric and a big part of my DNA and it makes me who I am. So, we were always taught to give back. I heard an interesting phrase the other day: The first part of your life, you learn and the second part of your life, you earn and the third part of your life, you return, and I am hopeful that I have been returning and trying to return and I think that was ingrained in me as a child. An interesting story about

that: When I was seven, again, we didn't...just to go back to my childhood...we didn't have a lot of money at all and so, as in most families, Christmastime was a really big deal for us and I remember that whole year I kept saying, "I have to have an Etch-A-Sketch. Whatever you do, please get me an Etch-A-Sketch. It's the most important thing. I have to have this Etch-A-Sketch. So, lo and behold, Christmas comes and I got an Etch-A-Sketch and I also got a coloring book and one of those little eight things of crayons or whatever and I remember, I played with it, I was so excited and my father came up to me and he said, "What's your favorite gift?" I said, "Really? The Etch-A-Sketch is my favorite gift; no doubt about it" and he said, "That's the one then." And I said, "That's the one, what?" and he said, "That's the one that you'll be giving to the kids of St. Jude." I said, "Oh, no, no, no, the crayons; really, the crayons are my favorite gift. There's no doubt. Take the crayons" and he said, "No, no, no, the Etch-A-Sketch is your favorite and you have to give...that's your best gift; you've said it. You now need to give your best to St. Jude." So it was a hard lesson in philanthropy, I have to tell you but it hit home at an early age and we all knew that however successful we may or may not be in life, whatever small successes we had needed to be shared with those who couldn't. That was an important lesson I got early on about charity and helping others and so forth.

Blanche Touhill: How old were you when you went to St. Jude's and saw the children?

Joyce Aboussie: In my teens. I was always involved in fundraising. That's how I got my start in fundraising. I actually started fundraising for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. I actually collected coins door-to-door as a kid. They used to have these things called "teenage marches" so my brother and sisters who were older than me would go on these teenage marches and collect coins for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital when I was a little kid and I would tag along and then when I got older, I obviously visited it. Then I helped chair with my father at a convention that we had here in '81 and then thereafter, I became a board member of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and was the youngest member then elected to the board of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and have been the longest serving member thus far. So it's really terrific.

Blanche Touhill: When you went for the first time, was it a thrill?

- Joyce Aboussie: It was a thrill. I saw there a place of hope and I saw something that I knew how hard our family and families like us across the nation have helped build this great jewel, this gift to the world and that we are making a difference and I knew that that's something that I always wanted to stay involved with my whole life.
- Blanche Touhill: Did your brother, as long as he lived, and your sisters, do they still take part in this?
- Joyce Aboussie: Yes, they are very big supporters of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. They're not on the board; I'm on the board and I guess I'm the family designee, if you will, but I took that very seriously. It was a hard lesson at seven. I didn't completely understand it but I got to understand it and I got to appreciate it. I got to love it and it's my passion. Many folks believe politics is my passion and they are right, but my real passion is St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.
- Blanche Touhill: That's a wonderful cause. We've had other members of the International Women's Forum who have had similar kinds of experiences but none, you had to give up the Etch-A-Sketch.
- Joyce Aboussie: Etch-A-Sketch, yeah. Actually, they told that story at my father's funeral, part of his eulogy, interesting, yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: How was Danny Thomas?
- Joyce Aboussie: A great guy. I really liked him.
- Blanche Touhill: How did he get into that idea?
- Joyce Aboussie: Really, seriously, so it's an interesting story. He had no money...an interesting story...he went to church and Marla was just being...actually had been born and his wife was in the hospital and he had to go the next day to get them out, to get Marla out of the hospital; he didn't have any money and he had not enough money to get her out of the hospital and he went to church and he was praying to somebody and he found a statue of St. Jude and it had a card and it said that St. Jude is the patron of hopeless cases...
- Blanche Touhill: Patron of hopeless cases.

Joyce Aboussie: Right, so he said, "Okay, Patron of hopeless cases, you go to help me because I don't have any money. I can't get my first born child out of the hospital and help me find my way in life and I'll build you a shrine." He didn't really know what that meant. He just said it at the time and he gave \$52 which was the majority of what he had in his pocket to St. Jude so the next morning he gets a call to do a radio announcement job. It paid \$520. He got Marla out of the hospital and it started a career in show business and entertainment, which is what he wanted to do. So he went from announcing radio commercials to entertaining and television and production and syndicated television shows, big shows, not just his own show but shows you've heard of in the old days, The Andy Griffith Show, he had a part of; the I Love Lucy show, studios and Mod Squad and some of those older shows, he was a big part of.

Blanche Touhill: Does Marla take part in St. Jude's?

Joyce Aboussie: Marla is a huge part of St. Jude and probably one of the closest friends in my life. She is incomparable. She's got a heart of gold and she's got a laser brain and she is a force to be reckoned with but she is very involved in St. Jude and not just in and out or intermittently but every minute of every day. I'd venture to say by the time that I leave here and I look at my iPhone, I'll have a dozen e-mails from Marla on something that I have no idea what it will be yet this morning but it will be something.

Blanche Touhill: How did St. Jude move to being a shrine to a hospital?

Joyce Aboussie: Well, it wasn't a shrine. It was just, he said, "I'll build you a shrine" and then he didn't know what he wanted to do and then when he started...he got a TV show and he started making money, he said, "I got to figure out a way to pay back my promise." So he went on and he asked a lot of people, "What should I do? What should I do?" and he said he wanted to do something to give back and a couple of different folks, key folks in his life told him, "If you want to help..."...another story that had a big impact on him, when he was a kid, he watched other kids die of all these different diseases and no one would help them, especially because he grew up in a very poor neighborhood and they were African American. So he wanted to have a hospital that wasn't just a hospital and he went around and talked to experts and they said, "Don't do a hospital. Anybody can have a children's hospital. Put a research component to it. Figure out how to cure the diseases, not how to put a band-aid on it, not

how to fix them quickly but how to cure them.” So that’s why today we have our Beacon of Hope in Memphis, Tennessee which serves all 50 states, 72 different foreign countries, we have the highest success rate for all catastrophic pediatric cancers and brain tumors and sickle cell and pediatric aids of anybody in the world and we treat children totally free of charge. Amazing!

Blanche Touhill: Amazing!

Joyce Aboussie: A million nine a day it takes to raise...we keep...

Blanche Touhill: A million nine a day?

Joyce Aboussie: A million nine a day, that’s right, and last year, a little hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, which has now grown to be the largest healthcare charity in the nation today and at the end of this week, Harris will announce that we are the top healthcare not-for-profit brand in the nation today, all with one man’s dream. So I had lots of inspiration in my life. I had lots of folks to look up to. I had big shoes to fill and...

Blanche Touhill: But you felt that you did have big shoes to fill?

Joyce Aboussie: Oh, big time, always a challenge and you know what? Just if you think that you’re doing great, walk through the halls of St. Jude and see others that aren’t doing so great. It really kind of frames it up for you. The week before last, we were at board meetings and these were long and tough board meetings and we have a volunteer board; our board is volunteer, all made up of volunteers. We pay our own way; we buy our own tickets; we do our own fundraising; we are an independent board. Just imagine 40 other folks like me and it’s an interesting atmosphere. They lasted 13 ½ hours and we were exhausted and we left the room saying, “We’re dead; we’re tired” and we walked out of that room and we walked into folks who had babies in their arms, mothers walking the halls and I’m here to tell you, you want to frame up the fact that you’ve got an acre of pain or a problem or something that’s upsetting, go walk in their shoes. It makes you a better person.

Blanche Touhill: When you were in elementary and secondary school, were you raising money for St. Jude? You were.

Joyce Aboussie: I was, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Did you know you wanted to go into development?

Joyce Aboussie: I don't know that it was called development. I only knew that I wanted to be involved with St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and then I knew that if you took your causes and your passions, you could make a difference. So I knew that. Then my father was involved with the school board and my uncle was involved with city politics and I always would hear about it and I figured that it's a terrific place to place some of my passions, some of the things I cared about. So when I was in high school, I remember in high school, they gave us a questionnaire, when I was a junior in high school and they said, "Complete this questionnaire" and it was about occupation, what did you want to be, and I remember it said, "stewardess"; I remember it said, "nurse"; I remember a bunch of different boxes on there that we were supposed to check and at the very end it said "other" and I remember writing in political consultant.

Blanche Touhill: Really?

Joyce Aboussie: Yeah, when I was a junior in high school and I remember that and I thought, I really want to be a political consultant. I wasn't all that sure what it means and now that I am sure what it means, I'm not sure I should have ever written that but it is what it is.

Blanche Touhill: And you talked to your friends about politics too?

Joyce Aboussie: Oh, yeah, all the time.

Blanche Touhill: You were active in politics?

Joyce Aboussie: I was, I had bumper stickers...

Blanche Touhill: So you were delivering circulars or...

Joyce Aboussie: I was doing all of the above, absolutely. I was delivering it; I was doing mailings; I was knocking on doors; I was putting bumper stickers on cars. I was doing all of the above when I was young. I was engaged and I tried to get others engaged and the kids were like, "Get away from me; I want to ride my bike." They were normal; I wasn't and still am not.

Blanche Touhill: So you graduated from high school and you went to college.

Joyce Aboussie: Yeah, St. Louis University.

Blanche Touhill: And did you major in...

Joyce Aboussie: Political science.

Blanche Touhill: In political science?

Joyce Aboussie: Oh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: That would be a natural?

Joyce Aboussie: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And you enjoyed it?

Joyce Aboussie: Yeah, I did.

Blanche Touhill: But it was more theoretical?

Joyce Aboussie: Totally, it was more theoretical and I was doing practical work by then and, in fact, when I was a junior in college, I actually started my first company that was running campaigns. So I actually was pretty smug and thought I knew more than some of my professors.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you probably did in the practical sense of the word.

Joyce Aboussie: I'm sure I did, in the practical sense.

Blanche Touhill: Because I think political science courses, there's an awful lot of theory in them until you get...

Joyce Aboussie: Very interesting, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: But very interesting.

Joyce Aboussie: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: So you started your business and did you go around and say to people, "I'll manage your campaign" or what does a political consultant do?

Joyce Aboussie: Well, I got my first big break...I don't remember the year...maybe '79, really. I graduated in '79 and I guess it was '79 or '80, I kept understanding that, in fact, Fleischman/Hilliard, God love them, had been running this campaign for the City of St. Louis called "The Salary Ceiling." Up until that point, there was a \$25,000 salary ceiling in the City of St. Louis: doctors, city doctors, city lawyers...no one...the mayor...no one

could get paid than \$25,000 and this was now 1980, I think...yeah, and so Fleischman/Hilliard had run the campaign multiple times, probably close to a half a dozen different times and they kept failing and they kept losing and I kept studying that race and figuring that they were just running it wrong. I know that they were running commercials that said, "You get what you pay for" and it was the wrong approach. It was not only the wrong approach from a messaging perspective, it was just the wrong approach from a strategic perspective because you shouldn't have been running television ads. And I learned then that not all campaign consultants understand how to really win campaigns. They know how to just do the same thing over again. So I went in and I remember I came in with, like, a piece of paper and a strategy and I went up against...I remember Fleischman/Hilliard, I remember they had a whole team of people and I remember they had...at that time, it wasn't...it would have been equivalent to today's Power Point but it was a big overhead projector and all these really neat slides and all these overhead things about whatever, and I thought, oh, well, this is going to go well, and I walked out after pitching it and I said, "Look, I disagree with what's been done in the past and I think you need a strategic approach. I think you need to target demographically and geographically, the voters who will turn out and then educate just those voters and not get anybody else out" and we did and we won and that was a real big break for me. From then, my career took off because I started winning races and using a different approach and actually, a more cost-effective approach.

Blanche Touhill: But you knew that because you had worked or you had been associated with people who had worked in the polls (enlisted?) the citizens in the precinct, basically how they vote?

Joyce Aboussie: Right, and then I began to figure out how better to computerize all that before there was time to do it and then to study voting patterns and voting trends and then trying to get down to the household level so that I would actually figure out which household voted and which one didn't as opposed to just looking at it en masse which was incredibly important. Then, I forgot to tell you, one of the most important things is, in 1976, I was involved with the Gephardt's campaign for Congress and, of course, stayed with Dick Gephardt for 28 years and became his national political director.



Blanche Touhill: But you graduated from college in '79?

Joyce Aboussie: Correct.

Blanche Touhill: So you started with Gephardt when you were a sophomore?

Joyce Aboussie: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you weren't the main person but you were one of the people?

Joyce Aboussie: Yes and then in '78, I was his campaign manager.

Blanche Touhill: I'm sorry, what?

Joyce Aboussie: In college I then was his re-election campaign manager and then was with him all...

Blanche Touhill: ...for the rest of your...

Joyce Aboussie: I was with him since '76...

Blanche Touhill: ...until he retired?

Joyce Aboussie: Well, it was the campaign in '76 and then I worked in the district office as an intern in '77, worked on the campaign in '78 and then, from there on out.

Blanche Touhill: You ran the office?

Joyce Aboussie: Well, for him, I ran the national political operation, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, you did, yeah. But go back to...how did you figure out or how did it come to you to get into the minutiae of the voting?

Joyce Aboussie: It's just something I've always been interested in. I've always been interested in trends and statistics and numerics and volume and I looked at it on a different scale. I think they were looking at it from a broad-based messaging perspective which is incredibly important in some elections and then in other elections, it's important to look at numbers and how to actually get "yes" voters to the polls and there's various schools of thought and various strategic approaches and they need to be implemented based on election turnout and modeling. So I actually was really into modeling at that time, certainly not modeling as one would know it but vote modeling and voter trends.

- Blanche Touhill: How did Dick happen to realize that you had this ability?
- Joyce Aboussie: You know, my dad got me an internship with the campaign and I remember my dad saying something, pretty interesting to me, he said, "Your name will get you in. So there you go. I recommended you and your name is going to get you in but you are going to be the one to stay so a recommendation will only get you so far and work ethic will get you the rest of the way so it's up to you from here on out," and it was pretty interesting and great information that I learned.
- Blanche Touhill: You know, we had a chancellor here, Arnold Grobman who was very much in favor of urban universities. You probably remember Arnold.
- Joyce Aboussie: Mm-hmm.
- Blanche Touhill: And we always referred to ourselves with the non-traditional student, the student who was older, who came back, might take six years to get a degree rather than four, worked and he referred to them as citizen scholars.
- Joyce Aboussie: Hm, interesting.
- Blanche Touhill: And he said urban universities that are really connected to the community will create these urban scholars who really don't take much part in campus activity because they're tied to the community.
- Joyce Aboussie: Yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: And you're an example of that and Vince Schoemehl from UMSL, while he was here, he was busy in the aldermanic races and then he ran and then he took his friend, McGuire and...
- Joyce Aboussie: ...and the whole group.
- Blanche Touhill: ...and the whole group with him.
- Joyce Aboussie: Yeah, absolutely.
- Blanche Touhill: Which is sort of an interesting...now, I know St. Louis U, it was an urban university, that you could have a job that would prepare you for the future while you were going through school that you couldn't have if you went into a more rural area.

Joyce Aboussie: That's true.

Blanche Touhill: And you're an example of that.

Joyce Aboussie: I don't know about that but...

Blanche Touhill: So, tell me about what you did for Mr. Gephardt.

Joyce Aboussie: Well, I ran all of his political operations and all his campaigns and then I decided that I really enjoyed polling a lot and started a couple of different companies, started three different companies through my time and then landed upon the company that I still have now called Telephone Contact which is, I think, 28 or so years old now, something like that. I figured out how to integrate voter files with computer data to then phone specific targeted voters with those specific messages that resonate to that household and because of that company, because of kind of that technique that was new at the time, I ran a bunch of different campaigns: bond issues; lots of school tax campaigns; school district campaigns; lots of tax initiatives locally, and then I branched out and did lots of state-wide and go involved in national campaigns and that's what I love.

Blanche Touhill: And do you go to...

Joyce Aboussie: While I was doing the Gephardt stuff, it allowed me to be engaged in a whole bunch of other campaigns at all different levels. So I would work to make sure that we trained folks and put them in positions. We really worked at recruiting new young people, new energy, new life into the Democratic party, placing them in offices and working so that we would have a great back bench and...Bob Holden and May Scheve and a whole bunch of other folks...Joe Maxwell and others all got their start in Dick Gephardt's 88 presidential campaign.

Blanche Touhill: Working in one of your companies?

Joyce Aboussie: Working for our Gephardt presidential campaign and I was obviously very much involved in it, that my company also worked for, yeah. Interesting, isn't it?

Blanche Touhill: Well, it ballooned up. When you work on one of these campaigns, is it a bidding process or is it people call you? Do they have the freedom to hire whomever they wish?

Joyce Aboussie: Both. There's some instances where you bid against others and there are other instances where they just call you and say, "Will you work on this?" Most of the time, it's the latter. They just call and say, "I would like your help on this" and I don't bid against anybody, generally speaking, and then other times it's different.

Blanche Touhill: When Obama won, about three days before Obama won, I guess before the voting, I heard on the television that some traditional political consultants said that he wasn't doing anything that was sort of a regular kind of way to approach the voters...

Joyce Aboussie: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: ...that they didn't think he could win and when he won, they said, well, he had moved to the new technological age. He had moved to tweeting and to computers and being in constant contact with people that he thought were going to vote for him. Did you create that?

Joyce Aboussie: I didn't create that. That would be a lie, to say that I created it. He took interesting...you know, the Obama campaign is a wonderful test case of integrating new mediums and talking to people on their level. So, he talked to folks that were moved by Facebook and then their friends on Facebook, to move their friends. So you would be an influencer of the people who followed you. He implemented the same technologies all through the digital atmosphere, if you will, through a multi-platform communications campaign and targeting messaging that actually worked. He also used polling in a very, very different way. So the engagement tool on polling was not just tracking which were traditional means which were what the Republicans were doing and they were sampling, their methodologies of sampling were, frankly, off in this last election because they were modeling it after a different turnout election and the fact of the matter is Obama was right on. I remember, I was on the National Finance Board for President Obama, I remember being on our calls every Thursday afternoon. We'd have a call with a campaign manager and the pollster and so forth and we knew what was pretty much happening the whole time and I remember all of my Republican friends, hair on fire, saying, "We're going to beat you" and I said, "No, it's not possible." I remember just in Ohio, when they were saying they were tracking, a friend of mine was getting the Republican numbers and sharing them with me and he said, "You know, we've got tracking polls and they're

sampling 800 every night. We're rolling samples of 800 in Ohio and Romney is ahead." I said, "Okay, well, Obama is sampling 80,000 a night and I promise you that Obama is well ahead. He'll win by four." So, it's funny, a real fun thing I did was in 2011, I was asked to present the civic progress on what was going to happen in the 2012 election and I did it in November of '11 and I loved doing it because I explained why Obama was going to win a year out and enjoyed actually telling him that Claire McCaskill would be reelected and that many folks in the room were supporting John Brenner at the time and I said, "He's not even going to be the nominee in the Republican..." ...so I enjoyed that. It was kind of fun. Those are the kinds of fun things you can do when you have insight on polling and really understand how to read and interpret data.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I heard you gave a speech to the International Women's Forum and you really said this is sort of a puzzle and that these states are the ones that will swing one way or the other and others won't swing and you have to figure out which ones can still swing...

Joyce Aboussie: That's right.

Blanche Touhill: ...and who are the people in those states that will make it go.

Joyce Aboussie: That's right. Yeah, absolutely. That's how it works.

Blanche Touhill: It's...what would you say? I'd say it's a puzzle but you wouldn't use that word.

Joyce Aboussie: It's just a targeted approach on turnout methodologies, that's what I would say.

Blanche Touhill: Is it hard to get the people to come out?

Joyce Aboussie: Absolutely. You have to make them feel engaged and make them feel a part of it. I think that they felt, in '08, a real cause, a real part of something bigger and that's what politics is. It makes people feel that they are part of something bigger than themselves. That's the genius of politics. It makes them feel that they are part of it and he capitalized on the word "change" in a way and it makes them feel that they are part of a bigger movement and something that they can actually affect. That's the beauty of politics. That's the beauty of making things happen for the good of the country, good of the region.

Blanche Touhill: Your friendship with Dick Gephardt lasted forever, didn't it?

Joyce Aboussie: Still does, talked to him last night. Yeah, he's a great guy.

Blanche Touhill: And what is he doing now?

Joyce Aboussie: He's on a lot of different boards. He's on the Ford board; he's on the U.S. Steel board; he's got a firm in D.C. He's doing great.

Blanche Touhill: Does he live in D.C.?

Joyce Aboussie: He has a place in D.C., he has a place in Florida and a place in California so he's doing...

Blanche Touhill: Okay. So he no longer is Missouri?

Joyce Aboussie: He is no longer a resident of Missouri, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: He probably comes in and out?

Joyce Aboussie: Oh, he does, definitely.

Blanche Touhill: He has family here?

Joyce Aboussie: Oh, sure, yeah. You bet.

Blanche Touhill: Well, when I think of Roosevelt used the radio and Truman used the train and I guess Clinton, I think, used the bus to tour America.

Joyce Aboussie: Sure.

Blanche Touhill: What Obama did is he used the computer.

Joyce Aboussie: The internet, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And that's a transportation mode as well.

Joyce Aboussie: Much faster transportation and much more effective and much more targeted.

Blanche Touhill: Are the Republicans now using it?

Joyce Aboussie: They're really trying to understand the role of big data in politics and they have invested heavily in it and I think they're doing good. They're playing catch-up.

Blanche Touhill: Let's go back to why people vote. They come out to vote and that's the hardest thing, to get them to come out, to be registered and then to act on that registration.

Joyce Aboussie: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And they feel they can make a change, that there is a feeling in the country and they do say, "Yes, I'm going to go down that route" but do they also vote for themselves?

Joyce Aboussie: They vote their pocketbook; they vote for causes they care about, their own personal causes that they may care about or have an issue that's affecting them or their family or their friend or their associates and then a lot of people just come out and vote "no." They just are kind of "no" voters on most things. Any kind of progress, they'll vote "no" on, and then there's some people who only come out on tax issues. There are some people that will only come out for presidential campaigns or presidential election years. There are some people that will only come out to vote against taxes and it's interesting and that's actually what I understood early on, is to figure out the pattern voter, who does only come out to vote anti-tax; who does only come out to vote when there's a contested Democratic primary who does come out to vote only when there's a contested Republican primary and I capitalized on that at a younger age.

Blanche Touhill: How did you figure that out?

Joyce Aboussie: Just through studying and I spent a lot of time down at the election board and looked at voter data and, in fact, I was telling everybody at my office who are much younger than I am, we would literally go down and look at voter cards. They didn't have them computerized at the time and I was actually one of the first ones to begin to computerize the voter data of the election board. It's really fun and lots of work.

Blanche Touhill: So when the computer came on to the scene, you realized how it would affect politics?

Joyce Aboussie: Well, I learned the hard way and it paid off. I learned how to integrate the information and update it.

Blanche Touhill: Do you use the same technique to raise money for St. Jude?

Joyce Aboussie: Certainly, yeah. We use all different methodologies to raise money for St. Jude. First of all, we have the best healthcare brand in the nation today and that doesn't hurt and we cure the sickest of children. What I always tell people and they say "I've got a great children's hospital here in St. Louis" which we do. We have great children's hospitals here in St. Louis or they say, "I'm from Cleveland. We've got a great hospital here" or Miami, everybody's got great children's hospitals. I understand that but we're not a children's hospital. We're the premier research center for the sickest kids. So kids don't come through the emergency room when they have a skinned knee and need stitches or a tonsillectomy or whatever. They come because they've essentially been handed a death sentence and we now try to cure them and that's what we do and we do it pretty well. We have the highest success rate of anywhere in the world. When we opened our doors in 1962, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the cure rate for acute lymphoblastic leukemia was 4% and today it's 94% and that's because of the research and treatment and progress that we have made at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Blanche Touhill: So your doctors are really research people?

Joyce Aboussie: Absolutely. In fact, we've got Nobel Prize winners; we've got...every major scientific award winner is on our staff at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Blanche Touhill: Do you get federal or state money?

Joyce Aboussie: We do not. We are the only hospital in the country where 74% of the funds we raise come from the public. So there are a few grants, some NIH grants and some other grants. Three and four dollars of everything we raise come from the general public.

Blanche Touhill: And how did the people get there?

Joyce Aboussie: They're recommended from their physician. They get a diagnosis and...

Blanche Touhill: But they have to make their own way there?

Joyce Aboussie: No, we pay for their way.

Blanche Touhill: You pay for their way?

Joyce Aboussie: We pay for their...



Blanche Touhill: And what do you do with the parents?

Joyce Aboussie: We pay for their parents. We pay for the travel, food and lodging and all while they're there, plus the treatment.

Blanche Touhill: And some children probably stay six months, don't they?

Joyce Aboussie: Some children, unfortunately, stay six years, some children, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: But you're learning from them while they're there?

Joyce Aboussie: Absolutely and we're curing them and we're giving them hope and we're giving them life back and there's lots of wonderful stories about that.

Blanche Touhill: You want to tell us one?

Joyce Aboussie: Sure. I was a co-creator of a campaign which is now in our 10<sup>th</sup> year...I'm really proud about...it's called Thanks and Giving for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. It's between Thanksgiving and Christmas and Marlo Thomas and Tony Thomas and Judy Habib, another board member and myself co-created it. We put together a plan that would literally take us out of the...we all were out to dinner one night. We said, "We've got to get out of the..." ...no slam on baked chicken dinners but we said, "We got to get out of the baked chicken dinner business where we're doing 32 different fundraising events across the nation every year. We have a million one volunteers and we've got to figure out how to monetize and get partners that will help us monetize," and we created a concept called Thanks in Giving which is between Thanksgiving and Christmas and 10 years ago...this was our 10<sup>th</sup> year and we went inside of corporate partners and we sat and figured out how they could help us monetize their customers. So instead of just going to CEOs of big corporations, which is what most folks do and say, "Give me a check; give me your dough. You're a wealthy millionaire; write a check to me," we said, "We don't want your check. We want your customers. So figure out how we can incorporate your brand and our brand and monetize that." And so we signed up now, after the 10<sup>th</sup> year, 87 different corporate partners and when you go shop, when you see our logo in the store, all those things, that was all the campaign for Thanks in Giving. This year, that campaign, I'm happy to report, this year, the 10<sup>th</sup> year, we are at 98 million dollars, just off that campaign just this year. So we've raised over 700 million through the 10 years in this campaign. So, I'm really very excited about it

and an interesting part of it, you asked for an interesting story: Westfield was a terrific client of mine. They're not here in Missouri anymore but they used to be and I got them to be...they're one of the largest shopping center owners in the country and I said to them, "You got to be a partner with St. Jude." I wanted marketing, I wanted it all. I asked for everything for St. Jude. I won't hold back. "I want promotions in all your malls, please. I want everything." So the interesting thing about Westfield Mall is they have this really terrific carousel in most of their malls around the country and this lady out in California is at a Westfield Mall and she had just come from the doctor with her little girl and she had a very, very, very rare form of cancer and she literally...the doctor said to her, "I've never seen anything like this before. I'm sorry, this is not anything we can deal with. This is very bad news and take your daughter home" and she said, "What can I do? Please, give me something I can do," and he said, "Take your daughter home and photograph her." So, she obviously was distraught and she thought she'd take her on this carousel because she always liked to do it. She'd take her daughter on the carousel and as they were going around the carousel, she saw our sign for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and our cure rate and she kept going around and around and around and then it kind of dawned on her and then she went back and she pulled up our website and then she saw our commercials on TV and it all kind of clicked and she called there. She was accepted within 48 hours and her daughter is a beautiful teenager. That's an interesting story.

Blanche Touhill: It's a wonderful story.

Joyce Aboussie: It's a great story. It's what we do every day at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Blanche Touhill: Well, let's talk a little bit about...

Joyce Aboussie: So you can change lives there. You can change lives in politics. You can do a whole lot of fun things.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Talk about, if you had been born 50 years earlier, how would your life be different?

Joyce Aboussie: You know...

Blanche Touhill: Or would it?

Joyce Aboussie: I think I probably would have still been engaged and involved in politics, probably just at a much different level and it would have been harder and tougher and that's okay because I'm all right with some challenges. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. There wouldn't have been a St. Jude, I guess, then, or we would have been just on the cusp of creating St. Jude and I'm hopeful that I would have been smart enough and insightful enough to be involved in creating something bigger than that, just something as big as St. Jude and being involved in the early stages of it.

Blanche Touhill: I always think of Marlo Thomas as being sort of the first woman to do this or the first woman to do that. I think that's sort of her persona but that's your persona too.

Joyce Aboussie: I don't know about that. I don't know if it's my persona. I can tell you it's absolutely her persona. She is a role model. She is a role model for women. She's been a role model for me. I always think of, "What would Marlo do right now?" and in meetings, I remember sometimes channeling her...we talk a lot. I'll talk to her, like, "I channeled you in a meeting today. I don't know if you heard it." She's like, "Oh, boy, what did you do?" and she doesn't give up. I mean, the interesting thing about Marlo, which I love about her and I want to strangle her sometimes about, is I'll walk into a meeting and I have 10 things on my list that I want, okay, fully knowing I'm not going to get all 10; probably maybe be happy if I get 4 but I have to have these 3. Down deep inside in my brain, I know these 3, I've got to get, but I'm coming in with 10. She comes in with 10, she will negotiate; she will get all 10. I'm just telling you and she is a fierce competitor when she is...she is driven and she works harder than anybody I've ever met in my entire life and she is very focused and very bright and a great human being. She doesn't have to be doing what she does every day. She doesn't need it but she needs it. There's a difference. She doesn't have to have it but she wants it. She does it for all the right reasons. She is a terrific person. She's one in a million.

Blanche Touhill: Are there any awards that you've gotten that you'd sort of like to...I mean, you can talk about anything...I mean, one of them or ten of them or...that have some special meaning?

Joyce Aboussie: I don't know that I'm going to pick one campaign over another. I've run now close to 500 campaigns.

Blanche Touhill: Five hundred campaigns!

Joyce Aboussie: About 480, but who's counting and there's lots of different campaigns that stick out in my mind and I don't know...I guess the best award I have gotten is to become a chair of the board of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the first female chair in 50 years. It took 50 years to get a female chair of the board of a 78% male board and I became the first and haven't had one since, female chair of the board of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. I guess that's probably a really terrific award for me.

Blanche Touhill: It's your peers saying you're our leader?

Joyce Aboussie: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And that says an awful lot.

Joyce Aboussie: Yeah, they're terrific. It's a great organization. We do good stuff.

Blanche Touhill: Do you travel a lot?

Joyce Aboussie: I do, I travel a lot. I travel to Memphis a lot for St. Jude for board meetings.

Blanche Touhill: But you travel for politics too.

Joyce Aboussie: I travel for politics and I'm hoping to travel more for politics in the future.

Blanche Touhill: Of course. How many people do you have working for you?

Joyce Aboussie: Oh, about eight or so.

Blanche Touhill: And does that expand when you have a campaign?

Joyce Aboussie: No, because I don't really run campaigns anymore. I do mostly...although I'm involved with campaigns and I'm helpful to campaigns, I'm kind of at a point in my life where I can give advice and I can raise some money and can be helpful.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you're more probably talking about strategy.

Joyce Aboussie: I do a lot of strategic consulting for corporations.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, sure. Well, going back to St. Louis U, then did you learn how to research from St. Louis U?

Joyce Aboussie: You know, I don't know that I learned how to research from St. Louis U. I guess I learned certainly...look, I guess I was very curious about how it gets done and spent a lot of time at the election board and then just determined it. I don't know that anybody actually taught me. I think it's something we perfected through the years and had a lot of great help and lots of great people around me and I have a great staff. I mean, seriously, a wonderful staff and they should...and many of the folks around me have been around me for decades which they're more than staff; they're family and they're very close friends and they're really good and decent, smart, committed people who care about causes I care about and make a difference.

Blanche Touhill: Now, you talked about a case that St. Jude was able to help the young girl. Is there something in politics, was there some politician that you helped get elected who did something that you're really proud of?

Joyce Aboussie: There's too many to...there's just too many to go into. I mean, there's way too many things that were accomplished to begin to even think about naming any right now. I mean, I think the fact that I was involved with bringing the Rams to St. Louis was a big deal. I think the fact that I was involved with...when I drive by the Thomas F. Eagleton Courthouse, it's a big deal. When I look at the roads and highways and Blood Alley and Jefferson County that's now Highway 55, it's a big deal.

Blanche Touhill: And that took a long time to do.

Joyce Aboussie: A long time and when I look at some of the accomplishments, I get a little melancholy and then think, hey, you know what? We done okay; how's that? It's all right; we done good, as they say, in the old days...we done good, yeah. There's a whole lot of fun things. When I look at some of the campaigns that I ran, tax campaigns and school districts and institutions and it all works; it's all good.

Blanche Touhill: In the next 10 years, what do you think you'll be doing?

Joyce Aboussie: Hopefully voting for the first female president of the United States.

Blanche Touhill: Do you want to talk about that?

Joyce Aboussie: No, just that I hope that I'm voting for the first female president of the United States.

- Blanche Touhill: I think that it would be a historic moment.
- Joyce Aboussie: It will be and I'm looking forward to it, casting the ballot.
- Blanche Touhill: My mother used to talk about when women got the vote and she said, "You know, everybody said that the wife would just vote the same way as the husband..." ...
- Joyce Aboussie: Oh, yeah, good luck with that.
- Blanche Touhill: And she would laugh about that. She said, "Well, that isn't true."
- Joyce Aboussie: Not at all.
- Blanche Touhill: And, I think, out of World War I sort of came the notion that women can serve and give to the community.
- Joyce Aboussie: Absolutely.
- Blanche Touhill: But it was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that I think where women became a protected class...
- Joyce Aboussie: Absolutely.
- Blanche Touhill: ...that began the change, that we could be other than a nurse, a teacher, a social worker, a librarian or stewardess.
- Joyce Aboussie: That's right. You know something interesting, I remember in the...I don't remember the year...it was in the '80s, I remember Dick Gephardt used to have a really...basically at that time had a district, the third district that was South St. Louis and South County that was 97% white at the time, the district and I remember the City of St. Louis obviously at that time was north and south, black and white and I remember at the time that there was races for school board where at the time the Klu Klux Klan were fielding candidates for the school board for the City of St. Louis, for the public school system in the City of St. Louis. They were fielding candidates for the school board and there was a, they called it the "black slate" which was Reverend Nance and the "white slate" which was the Klu Klux Klan folks and I remember our district was 97% white and I said, I'm done. So while I was working for Dick, that's when I would always run campaigns and that's when I always thought, you know, it's good to make money from these campaigns and get hired from them, and then it's

another thing to actually then do something, right, and so I remember calling Earl Manse who I'm great friends with...

Blanche Touhill: Of course, everybody knows Earl Nance.

Joyce Aboussie: Yeah...who I'm great friends with still today...and saying, "I want to help you and your folks become school board members" and I remember running their campaign and I remember the committee people calling Dick Gephardt saying, "You can't have your campaign manager running their campaign," and I remember Dick calling me and saying, "I just want you to know these 10 people called me and wanted me to tell you not to do it but I'm telling you to do whatever you want because you're doing the right thing." I said, "Absolutely." So we won and then a couple years later, Earl got a couple of more folks from North St. Louis on the school board and we sent a message that we're not going to tolerate this anymore and it's very important. I think it was an important message in a time in the '80s where it was necessary. So that's important...another...

Blanche Touhill: I think you're a proud woman.

Joyce Aboussie: Yeah, absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: Why don't you comment on the International Women's Forum.

Joyce Aboussie: You know, it's a great group of women. It's a useful tool to talk and network and communicate and determine other challenges that some women are having and listen to different people's struggles and strategies. So I think it's a good group and I think it's great because it keeps kind of hitting the refresh button. I think that's really important. I think it's important to get new, younger women involved and moving and expanding the group so that we can learn from new strategies and new folks. So I think it's a great group. I think it's great for networking. I think it's building friendships. I think it's putting women who may not be at ease with each other in a room and making them at ease. So I think it's really important.

Blanche Touhill: Are your sisters political?

Joyce Aboussie: They're not. They vote and they are smart and they're engaged but I wouldn't call them political.

Blanche Touhill: But your brother was political?

Joyce Aboussie: My brother was probably less political too but he was involved and engaged and he was a donor and others, and look, my sisters are great friends and great sisters and I always say to them, "It can't be easy being my sister; it just can't be," so I love them and I love them that they let me do all the crazy things I do and love me for and that's okay.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I know how busy you are so I just want to say thank you for coming by and you're an institution in St. Louis and you're an institution for good and I did not know about your...I knew about your commitment to St. Jude but I didn't realize it was such a part of your life so I'm sure, on behalf of all the mothers and fathers who have had children there, that they thank you too. Thank you very much.

Joyce Aboussie: Thank you, Blanche. I appreciate it very much.