

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

MARCH 13, 2014

CYNTHIA BRINKLEY INTERVIEWED BY BLANCHE TOUHILL

Cynthia Brinkley: My name is Cynthia Brinkley.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about your early life: maybe your parents or your siblings or your grandparents or cousins or your elementary school friends or teachers. Is there somebody along the way that, at one point or another, said, "You know, you really have ability and if you go to school or you study, you have a potential to do..." this or that, anything like that. Talk about your early life.

Cynthia Brinkley: Well, I grew up on a farm in Northern Missouri. I am the middle child of five. My parents had five kids in about six-and-a-half years so it was a very busy time in our house. We had a very unusual life growing up in the sense of, my father worked, not only had the farm but he would be gone during the week because he was a construction manager. This was in the 1960's and so he would be gone all week, managing construction jobs all over the United States and he'd come back on weekends and farm. My mother, who was kind of a city girl, more or less, had to learn how to do all these farm things, besides raise children and I think the person who really...I know the person who influenced me mostly was my mother. She was just a remarkable woman. Besides managing all these children and the farm, she also went back to college, to nursing school. I remember one year, she had 21 hours that she was taking. She was president of her class. She sold Avon. She helped run the farm and she had five kids, actually, six at that time, because my second cousin whose parents had died, had come to live with us so we ended up with basically six children. So not many women can handle that kind of activity and do it with the grace that she did in just such an amazing way. She was really a great teacher and what she told me...what she told all of my siblings...was, the only failure that you'll ever encounter in life is not trying. So it's okay if

you try something and you fail. It's when you don't try something that is when that's the real failure. So I grew up with that attitude of really just trying things. My parents gave us responsibility at a very, very young age, good and bad. Now you probably look at that and say, "Oh, my gosh, what is this?" My brothers, at eight years old, were on the tractor for 10 hours a day. I was cooking breakfast at 6. So we had a lot of responsibility, and that happens a lot within a farm family. So we had a lot of responsibility at an early age. So, it was just expected that you do these things. So it wasn't extraordinary or it wasn't anything like that; it was just assumed that you had a lot of responsibility and you could handle it well. The other thing that my mother was so great at teaching was, things turn out for the best. So you have this attitude of adaptability because you try and if it doesn't work the way you want it, then it's for the best and you move on and you find a new route. It's not like, oh, well, that door is closed so that's over with. It's like, oh, well, then it's another route. So this adaptability and this willingness to try and the thought that there's no failure, that was a really, really great teaching for me growing up. So my mother had that and she was such a strong teacher. My father, on the other hand, was very affable. My mother was more intellectual. My father was definitely very affable and got along with everybody and just really had the gift of gab, as they say. So his ability to work with all kinds of people, I think also influenced me as well. We never thought of anyone as anything other than, they're just a person. You treat everyone the same. That's just how you...my mother stressed that and my father stressed that. That's just how it was. So, they were huge influences on me growing up and I think contributed a lot to my work ethic, to my willingness to take chances, to the adaptability which is so critical, I think, in terms of being a successful person, knowing how to adapt, particularly in the business world. Those were the things that I really learned quite a bit.

Blanche Touhill: How was your grade school? Did you go on a bus or...

Cynthia Brinkley: Well, yeah. I grew up in a very small school and so my senior year, we had 68 in our graduating class.

Blanche Touhill: From grade school or high school?

Cynthia Brinkley: From high school but grade school was about the same because you grow up with these kids. So I went on a bus. Sometimes we had to take a

tractor because the roads would get so muddy, you could not get through and so we had to take a tractor to the bus which was...

Blanche Touhill: Then you left the tractor?

Cynthia Brinkley: Left the tractor, yeah, and then come back...

Blanche Touhill: Until you came home?

Cynthia Brinkley: Uh-huh, yeah. It was a little, small tractor that had a little carry-all on back, carrying all these children. So that was how we got along and we did that. When I was in junior high, we moved from the town that I grew up in to a neighboring town because we bought a farm there and we stayed there...we were there about a year and then moved to another farm when my father had then started selling real estate and my mom was in a more advanced nursing class or school. We were there about another year until we moved back to our home town where we bought a nursing home which my mother ran and then a farm implement company which my father ran. So they were both small business people and both highly accomplished in terms of being able to run businesses. The interesting thing about my mother...she was in the 1970s and there weren't a lot of women business leaders, particularly in small towns...and she was on the bank board, which was unusual and my dad was on the school board. So they were very involved in the community. So that was just kind of an unusual thing, to have a woman who was on a bank board and she was very involved in politics as well.

Blanche Touhill: Did you work in either of those businesses?

Cynthia Brinkley: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, working was a big part of the life, quite a bit. I not only worked at home in terms of being responsible for cleaning the house and all of that, but I worked in the nursing home. So this was whenever I was about a sophomore in high school. My job, at that time, during the summer, was in activities and I had a four-hour afternoon job. It interfered with other things that I wanted to do so my attitude wasn't that great. So my mother then told me that she didn't think I was responsible enough for that job. So I got demoted or promoted...I think it was demoted...to laundry. So then I was in the laundry for eight hours a day. So I had a lot of...yes, I did a lot in terms of working in the businesses and my brother would work at the implement company besides farming because we still had the farming going on as well.

Blanche Touhill: So the high school was small, you had 68 in the...

Cynthia Brinkley: High school was very small. I was very involved in activities. I did a lot in high school. I was president of the student body; I was in the business club, vice president of that; I was a cheerleader; I was a lot of different things. It was important to me to be very involved. So it was a pretty busy lifestyle, between working...and then I also had a part-time job at the local newspaper once a week; it was a weekly paper.

Blanche Touhill: What did you do there?

Cynthia Brinkley: Production work. I actually physically stuffed the newspapers, way back when when they actually did that and so had that as well. So it wasn't anything unusual; it was just kind of a way of life and you didn't know any differently. I think that's the one great thing about living in a small town. Everybody knows everyone and there's just this sense of community and it can be really a great place to grow up. It was for me.

Blanche Touhill: How was the curriculum of the elementary and secondary school?

Cynthia Brinkley: You know, I loved to read. I was quite a reader and so I checked out books quite a bit at the library. The curriculum, I don't remember that much from...certain things were eventful for me: Second grade: a lot about reading; third grade: you're really starting to write cursively and fifth grade, the math really is starting to step up a little bit; sixth grade: so much on grammar, and then you get into the high school. So I had some wonderful elementary teachers. My first grade teacher, Mrs. Wilde, she was such a dear and was always so kind and so strict, but you really learned a lot. I would say my teachers in high school were more impactful than my teachers in grade school. I had two in particular in high school: Marilyn Carr, Mrs. Carr, who was the business teacher, and she was amazing. In fact, I still, to this day, stay in contact with her, and she was one who was very encouraging to me as well. I was in an organization called FBLA, which is Future Business Leaders of America, and she really wanted me to run for state office and I wanted to run for state office and I was thinking, "You know, I think I really want to run for vice president"; "No, you should run for president. You run for president." So I did. I wasn't elected but it was a great experience and one that I'll...you know, her enthusiasm and support and all my...you know, within the club.

Blanche Touhill: This is statewide?

- Cynthia Brinkley: Statewide, uh-huh.
- Blanche Touhill: For high school?
- Cynthia Brinkley: For high school, it was Future Business Leaders of America. It's called FBLA.
- Blanche Touhill: So you ran for president?
- Cynthia Brinkley: I ran for president, mm-hmm.
- Blanche Touhill: Were you the first woman to run for president?
- Cynthia Brinkley: No, I don't think so, no. I don't think so at all.
- Blanche Touhill: Had any female got elected before that?
- Cynthia Brinkley: Well, the woman who won was a female, mm-hmm, which was great. So I had that experience and she was a wonderful teacher. The other instructor I had was Mrs. Spencer, who taught speech and theater and one of my favorite subjects as well and she was just terrific in terms of encouraging you and...
- Blanche Touhill: Were you in theatrical productions?
- Cynthia Brinkley: Yeah, I was, uh-huh, and I enjoyed that a lot and she was terrific to work...
- Blanche Touhill: Do you sing?
- Cynthia Brinkley: I'm a legend in my own mind. I don't sing other than karaoke and just for fun but more just theater, acting and certainly in high school and it was a lot of fun. We did a variety show; we did other plays within high school and it was great fun. So I enjoyed that a lot.
- Blanche Touhill: How about your friends grade school or high school? Were they focused on being farmers?
- Cynthia Brinkley: Oh, no. We were all very involved. When you come from a rural community that's agricultural-based, everybody, in some form or fashion, is tied to that industry, for the most part. One of my best friends, her parents owned the newspaper. Another good friend, their family owned a big farming operation. So that was kind of...it was all tied in some form or fashion to the agricultural community. It's interesting because those

two friends, in particular, we're still friends today and speak at least once a week, if not more and get together three or four or five times a year. And so it's great to have that sense of history, that you can still connect with. One lives in Washington, D.C.; one lives in the Kansas City area and still somewhat my home town, but it's really great to have those kinds of friendships.

Blanche Touhill: Do you meet ever, together?

Cynthia Brinkley: As a class?

Blanche Touhill: No, as a group, your four friends?

Cynthia Brinkley: Oh, yeah, we meet four or five times a year.

Blanche Touhill: A year?

Cynthia Brinkley: Oh, yeah, at least.

Blanche Touhill: You come together?

Cynthia Brinkley: Oh, yeah, yes, we do frequently. So it's a lot of fun, to do that and we speak on the phone frequently. So it's really wonderful, to maintain that sense of history and to watch one another grow as we kind of go through our professional lives and where we end up and it's been really good.

Blanche Touhill: Then, where did you decide to go to college and how did you happen to choose that school?

Cynthia Brinkley: Well, you know, that's an interesting question. I really wanted to go out of state, to Texas, University of Texas, and my parents were saying, "No, you can go anywhere in the State of Missouri but you need to stay in Missouri for two years." I think they wanted me closer and just to kind of watch my growth and all that. So I went to the University of Missouri-Columbia. So, when I went to school, I didn't know exactly what I wanted to major in. I was thinking, journalism and so I started down that path. Then I was one of these who kind of changed their major several times. All the while I'm taking political science courses and courses like that, in the social sciences which I thought were very interesting and I just had a natural aptitude. So I was at the University of Missouri until my junior year. I had to have surgery my second semester of my junior year...my first semester, for my wisdom teeth and so I dropped out for a semester

because I was so ill. Then my parents were building the new nursing home and so for my last year-and-a-half, I transferred to Truman State University and where I finished up, got my degree there, which was a great experience. The University of Missouri-Columbia is such a large school and going to Truman State, it was a much smaller school and I was just so impressed with the quality of professors and I had one professor, in particular, who was just terrific, Candy Young, Dr. Candy Young, who taught one of my favorite courses which was called The Politics of Government Regulation, which is fascinating and it was just a great experience. So I graduated from college and I thought, you know, I think I want to go to California.

Blanche Touhill: In college, did you join a sorority or...

Cynthia Brinkley: No, I didn't. I thought about it. I went through rush, and the sorority that I wanted, they didn't want me and I didn't want to just join a sorority for the sake of joining a sorority so I didn't.

Blanche Touhill: Were you a leader at Truman State? Did you join things at Truman State?

Cynthia Brinkley: Not so much. I was really more focused on my academics. I was so involved in high school and so busy with everything there, I'd kind of reached a point of where I just wanted to not be as involved in the extracurricular and just be more introspective versus an extrovert. So that's really what I focused on.

Blanche Touhill: Did you make friends at Mizzou or Truman State that are still friendly with you today?

Cynthia Brinkley: I do, still to this day, yes, very close friends whom I still talk to on a regular basis and stay in touch with. Yes, I do. It's been great.

Blanche Touhill: What was your major?

Cynthia Brinkley: I majored in political science...social science and then after graduating from Truman, I worked in the political arena for about a year-and-a-half.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, good. Now, tell me about that.

Cynthia Brinkley: I first started out and I worked on a congressional campaign in the sixth district. I was what was the assistant press secretary. So I worked with the press secretary in terms of getting out all of the news releases and

things like that, the actualities and all that you did, travelled around, did some volunteer work. Went from there...we lost that campaign...

Blanche Touhill: Was that a paid position?

Cynthia Brinkley: No, it wasn't. It was a volunteer position.

Blanche Touhill: And you did that for a year-and-a-half?

Cynthia Brinkley: No, no, no, I did that for just a few months and then I moved to Kansas City where I was working in the mayoral race and I went from one campaign to the next. That was a paid position.

Blanche Touhill: And the same thing, you wrote things?

Cynthia Brinkley: No, in that position, I was the volunteer coordinator and so I coordinated all the volunteers. You kind of do a little bit of everything in campaign work and did that. Then, from there, I went to another campaign and that was a city council race where I basically kind of ran the campaign. I would say more the deputy campaign manager for that particular race. We were successful, which was great. Then I did a little fundraising. I did some not-for-profit fundraising and I did a fundraiser for another political candidate who was running for office. So that span of time was about a year-and-a-half during all those political campaigns. Then I decided to go back to the University of Missouri. Then I went back to school and got a journalism degree.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you did?

Cynthia Brinkley: Mm-hmm, yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you got a Master's in journalism?

Cynthia Brinkley: No, actually, it was another Bachelor's, yes, so I got a Bachelor's in Journalism from Missouri.

Blanche Touhill: So you write?

Cynthia Brinkley: I write, yes, and the intent, when I went back to school was I was thinking I would like to get into broadcast journalism in some form or fashion, or to write and/or both. It was interesting because when I was there, public relations or anything like that was not considered real journalism. They

had just started one class around strategic communications, public relations and I was...

Blanche Touhill: What year was that?

Cynthia Brinkley: That was in 1982...1983, actually, when I took the course...yeah, '83/'84.

Blanche Touhill: Do they now have a specialty area?

Cynthia Brinkley: Well, it was very interesting because I was asked to speak at commencement a couple of years ago at the Journalism School and the largest number of graduates are in Strategic Communications, which they did not even have...

Blanche Touhill: And that's PR?

Cynthia Brinkley: It's PR, and I was the one who took the very first class that they offered in that area. So it's very interesting how the evolution within education and just certainly within our society has taken hold.

Blanche Touhill: Was that program a year-and-a-half or two years or one year?

Cynthia Brinkley: It was two years actually; it was two years. So I finished that up and, except for my foreign language, they actually let me in the school without having taken any foreign languages. Thank you, Mary Anne Williamson, who did that. So, I was actually engaged and was going to...when I finished up my course work...going to be moving to Texas. So they said I could just finish up my foreign language there.

Blanche Touhill: And you did?

Cynthia Brinkley: I did. It took me a while. I wouldn't recommend taking Spanish III if you haven't been in any Spanish classes for a while. It's pretty tough. It's pretty intense, to do that. But I did finish up. It took me a while.

Blanche Touhill: Did you go to the University of Texas?

Cynthia Brinkley: No, I did not. I went to the community college that was based there because I was living in Austin.

Blanche Touhill: How was living in Austin?

Cynthia Brinkley: You know, Austin's a great city. It's changed a lot from when I was there. I was there in 1985/'86 through early 1990s and it was much smaller then,

not as big as it is now and the traffic issues weren't anything like they are now. It's a great city, great energy. The university is there. They do lots of things that keep the town eclectic, things such as having a Spam festival every year and an Eyore festival and great music, if you like music. It's a wonderful place to be. So I enjoyed being in Austin very much. It's physically beautiful.

Blanche Touhill: What did you do in Austin?

Cynthia Brinkley: Well, I went to work for Southwestern Bell. I had two different offers. One was from the American Cancer Society as their executive director, and the other was from Southwestern...

Blanche Touhill: In Austin?

Cynthia Brinkley: In Austin...one was from Southwestern Bell and I had never seen myself...I didn't really see myself in the corporate world. It wasn't something that I thought I would really like but they were offering me \$7,000 more dollars than the other one and I thought, well, I'll go; I'll try it for a couple of years and see what happened and 25 years later...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, you become the head of the St. Louis...

Cynthia Brinkley: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: What was your role in those days?

Cynthia Brinkley: I originally started out in a division of the company called Government and Public Affairs. So, at the time, the company was, and still is to an extent but nothing like it was before, heavily regulated. So anything, any kind of price increase, anything like that had to get approval of the regulators. Any time you wanted to introduce a new service, anything like that, had to get the approval of the regulators. So, that's where I started and my first job literally was more of a go-for job, taking filings out to the Texas Public Utility Commission and picking up ours and I just started picking up on a lot of things and would kind of report back what was going on and I think the powers that be saw that there was kind of more there than what they thought. So I was given a lot more responsibility. I moved from that job into really kind of coordinating a lot of the regulatory proceedings that we'd have, filings. I loved from that into being a company spokesperson with regard to...and to being kind of the

liaison to the Commission as well as the Texas legislature and keeping the company internally informed and just kind of playing that role. There was one role in particular where we were trying to introduce a new service called "Caller ID." This was very controversial, believe it or not, in Texas because it was considered an illegal trap and trace device. So the company policy...and Texas was the biggest market because at that time, we just had the five states and the headquarters were here in St. Louis, but the thought was was that we would introduce the service and not offer the ability to block your number. So my job was to go around to all these groups like the Domestic Violence with the women, the law enforcement, and try and get their support before we actually introduced it. It became very, very clear to me that support was clearly not going to come and we were going to have quite a battle royale if we didn't introduce some sort of blocking mechanism for those organizations. So I went to our senior vice president at the time...or the president, actually, of the State of Texas and told her...it was a female...and told her that, "This isn't going to work. We've got to change the policy" and she sided with me and really agreed and kind of fought the corporate, if you will, and we were able to change the policy and introduce it with blocking, but not before I didn't have an opportunity to testify before the Texas legislature and grilled by an unfriendly senator for it several hours about this service. It seems almost kind of silly now, in light of how common it is to see numbers appear, but at the time, it was a really big privacy issue in Texas. So I was there in that role and then the company relocated its corporate headquarters to San Antonio. This was in 1993. Then I was asked to come to San Antonio and be a part of the corporate public policy-making organization which was really trying to figure out, okay, what is it that we want in terms of what kind of laws do we need changed in order to successfully run the business? So we...

Blanche Touhill: By that time, was the company deregulated?

Cynthia Brinkley: Oh, no, not at all. This was part of that effort, to say, here's the things that we need to do and we need to work at the state level and at the federal level.

Blanche Touhill: And to get deregulation?

Cynthia Brinkley: Yeah. Well, I wouldn't even call it dereg...to have a business environment that would allow us to introduce...because technology was changing;

innovation was changing but the regulatory environment was not. So it was so stifling to be able to try and introduce new products and services. So that was a lot of what my job was and also, to go around to third party groups, the National Governors Association, National Council of State Legislators, any kind of national public policy-making organization and to work with them to make sure that the policies that they would enact would be supported by what things that we wanted to do. So during that time, obviously a lot of travel, a lot of white papers that I would write, a lot of meeting with people, but it was a very, very exciting time. It was also around that time when the Telecom Act of 1996 which was a federal act, was passed which...

Blanche Touhill: And what was that?

Cynthia Brinkley: Well, it basically changed how telecommunications companies could do business because at that time, we were still under the Divestiture Agreement when the Bell System was split up. So AT&T, legacy AT&T provided long distance. Companies like Southwestern Bell could only provide local. So this allowed companies like Southwestern Bell to get into the long distance business if they could prove competition. It was quite a battle all the way around with that but that's basically what that did and it really kind of opened things up. So it was at that time when our chairman, Ed Whittaker, who was quite a visionary in terms of really recognizing where the industry needed to go and he really was the catalyst that changed all of this, he made the decision and the board, to buy Pacific Bell on the West Coast.

Blanche Touhill: Now, at this time, AT&T did the long distance...

Cynthia Brinkley: Long distance, yes.

Blanche Touhill: And these companies in certain regions...

Cynthia Brinkley: Mm-hmm, they're called the Bell operating companies, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Okay. They could run their region?

Cynthia Brinkley: Right, but they couldn't go really beyond their region and they couldn't provide long distance service.

Blanche Touhill: Okay. So they were sort of contained?

- Cynthia Brinkley: Yes, very much so.
- Blanche Touhill: And what Whittaker saw was that had to be...
- Cynthia Brinkley: What Whittaker saw certainly is with the changing regulations, what really...
- Blanche Touhill: That had to be deregulated?
- Cynthia Brinkley: Well, certainly, yes but also that what would really be helpful is for a company to have scale in order to really be able to have the wherewithal to build the networks where you could actually have a national...international company.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, when Whittaker then was out to take over the Pacific area, did those geographic areas join?
- Cynthia Brinkley: Yes. Well, it wasn't contiguous, obviously because we had the five states, the original Southwestern Bell was Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, Texas and Oklahoma.
- Blanche Touhill: So it didn't touch...
- Cynthia Brinkley: No, it wasn't contiguous and so the first company that was purchased was Pacific Bell, or Pacific Telesis as it was called. So we made that purchase and I worked, when I was in San Antonio, on...because we had to get the approval of the regulators and the big challenge with regard to that purchase was with the California Public Utility Commission. So I worked and helped in that effort from a corporate...
- Blanche Touhill: Were they afraid of this joining?
- Cynthia Brinkley: Legally, they had to approve it, and of course, how this goes. I mean, you have to get the approval and they've got to make sure it's in the public interest, which is a very loose definition, but making sure there wouldn't be a concentration. I mean, remember, this was back in 1997. Cell phones were just starting. It was just such a different environment in terms of what it looked like.
- Blanche Touhill: And that cleared all the regulators?
- Cynthia Brinkley: Mm-hmm, yes.

Blanche Touhill: But then you bought other things?

Cynthia Brinkley: We did. I moved to California, to Los Angeles right after that merger, to help integrate the team and work and try to put all of it together. I was there for a year-and-a-half.

Blanche Touhill: What was your title there?

Cynthia Brinkley: I was the area vice president and so I was based on Los Angeles and I had the Los Angeles market basically. You're basically with a brand new company because I was the only SBC person at the time there and so it was working within a whole new culture and it was a great merger. It was a really great...because we came out...I think both companies became stronger. I thought it was a really great cultural...because their strengths were our weaknesses and vice versa. From there...getting back to your point about, there were more...there were more. We bought Southern New England Telephone which was based in Connecticut to really give us some real prototype, if you will, on how to run a long distance business because they could provide long distance. They weren't a Bell Operating Company so they could do that. We then bought...

Blanche Touhill: Were you able to bring long distance in...you said (two months?)...

Cynthia Brinkley: Not yet because we had to go state by state to prove that each market was competitive and it was quite a battle, to do all that. So from there, we wanted to buy Ameritech. Now, Ameritech was in the upper Midwest. That was in Illinois; that was in Michigan; that was in Indiana; Wisconsin, and so it was in those areas...Ohio as well, and the challenge there was more with the Federal Communications Commission. So it's almost like every time we had...buying a new company, I got moved. So then I moved to Washington, D.C. and where my role was really to lobby Congress to get support for this merger that would hopefully help us with the FCC's decision. So I worked in Washington on the Hill as a lobbyist for SBC for a year and we were successful, finally, getting that merger finished. Then from there, I moved to Little Rock, Arkansas where I was named President of SBC for Arkansas.

Blanche Touhill: Were you, at this time, were you deregulated?

Cynthia Brinkley: I wouldn't say deregulated because it came in varying formats. Some of the states were able...the long distance permission would come on a

state by state basis. So each state had varying degrees of “freedom,” if you will. We weren’t yet, at that time, able to offer long distance in any state, I don’t believe. It took about two years to finally get approval.

Blanche Touhill: So all told, to deregulate, that it took maybe a long time?

Cynthia Brinkley: Oh, yeah. I mean, there’s still a lot of regulation and I wouldn’t even call it “de” regulation. I would call it updating regulation because you’re talking about regulations that were put in place back in 1921 and the world has changed dramatically in the telecommunications industry since 1921. So there are a myriad of rules and regulations that varied so greatly state by state. So we really had to take a state by state approach to these problems in order to be able to effectively serve our customers.

Blanche Touhill: So, what Whittaker saw was that the communications revolution and the technological revolution was coming...

Cynthia Brinkley: Oh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: ...and that the telephone companies, under whatever name they were, had to get some freedoms in order to be involved in that new highway?

Cynthia Brinkley: Absolutely. I can’t speak exactly in terms of all of his thought processes but he was quite a visionary in all of this and it was his action...

Blanche Touhill: At least he saw when it started?

Cynthia Brinkley: ...is what started all of the activity, all of the consolidation because you had to have scale. You have to have scale in this business in order...in the telecommunications business, in order to be successful. It’s really hard not to be successful.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I always heard that the telephone business, the land lines, the companies don’t make much money off the land lines?

Cynthia Brinkley: Well, the land line itself, no. I mean, you’ve got to remember, now, the number of land lines is decreasing every year.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, but that whole revolution came in the ‘80s and the ‘90s?

Cynthia Brinkley: Absolutely and the technology changed which enabled wireless to come into play and so we became a very big wireless player. In fact, we were one of the first to buy wireless properties and were criticized for paying

too much for them and obviously now that's certainly history. But, it's been a rapid transformation, a rapid transformation in terms of land line to wireless...wire line versus land line.

Blanche Touhill: Now, up until the time that you became President of the Arkansas group, did you bump into the glass ceiling as you were moving up all the way through?

Cynthia Brinkley: You know, I'm probably unusual in this respect in that I was very fortunate within the company. I had great mentors, teachers, sponsors, both male and female, who were terrific. I never really thought of myself as a female. I mean, I was always...tried to be just myself; I didn't try to be, like...I mean, I'm not a man and I didn't really...I just tried to be myself. I just thought of it in terms of, you go every day; you work very hard; you try to bring as much value as you can; you try to see, okay, where do I bring value to this equation based on my skill set, based on what I can make happen? I realized, kind of looking back over my career, almost all of the jobs...not all of them...but well over half of the jobs I had were newly created. So it was almost like, kudos to, in my opinion, the leadership of Southwestern Bell, SBC now, AT&T for recognizing. I think Whittaker was just brilliant in terms of his ability to manage talent. He was great at it. He didn't bat a thousand but nobody does but he was really great at it and was particularly great with females and giving women a chance and recognizing...it wasn't just giving them a chance; it was just recognizing that, hey, you know, who can do the job, and that was the way he...and that's the culture of the company, which I think is terrific. Not all companies are like that, obviously. So I didn't feel like there was an issue that I was a female.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I know that the Southwest company...

Cynthia Brinkley: SBC?

Blanche Touhill: ...in Missouri, they did have a class action suit at one time.

Cynthia Brinkley: This was actually AT&T and this was part of the whole AT&T. This was back in the 1970s.

Blanche Touhill: Oh?

Cynthia Brinkley: Oh, yes, they did, very much and it was with AT&T and my understanding all the Bell Operating companies and Southwestern Bell was a part of that but that was long before Whittaker came into leadership.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I had always heard that that really cleared the way for a lot of pro...

Cynthia Brinkley: It helped a lot. It helped a lot because there was truly some...from what I understand; I wasn't there at the time...truly some discrimination and definitely...definitely a glass ceiling, without a doubt. One of my great mentors within the company who was just a phenomenal leader, Cassandra Carr, she was really, truly the first female officer within the company and she, at one time, was President of Texas and head of HR at one point for the company and head of External Affairs for the company. I think she clearly had some challenges in that way. She grew up on the operations side. At one time she was in charge of construction and engineering for the company in a market in Texas. So she clearly felt that and she was...I think that's one reason why she was so terrific and had done so much for women within the company, and outside of the company. She was one of the founders of Leadership Texas and did a tremendous job with that.

Blanche Touhill: What is Leadership Texas?

Cynthia Brinkley: It's a leadership development program that was started...gosh, I think it was back in the 1980s or '70s and it was really designed as a leadership program for women, just to kind of enter in and to learn from great teachers and from each other and it grew into a Leadership America and it's just done great things.

Blanche Touhill: Did you take part in any of those?

Cynthia Brinkley: No, I didn't. I had played a...

Blanche Touhill: But you watched it grow?

Cynthia Brinkley: I watched it grow. I certainly heard about it and I've been probably more involved with Leadership America since that time in terms of on the recipient, in terms of funding it and sending women...

Blanche Touhill: And [inaudible 40:51]

Cynthia Brinkley: Yes, and sending women through the program. It's terrific.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about Arkansas. You now arrive in Arkansas...

Cynthia Brinkley: So I'm in Arkansas and I was the first female President in Arkansas and it was kind of interesting because it was first like, "Oh, a woman!" and then it was like, "Oh, that's a woman." I mean, it was at first a bit of a novelty and then it was no big deal and it was a terrific opportunity. It's a wonderful, wonderful place to be and so many great people there.

Blanche Touhill: Where were you officed?

Cynthia Brinkley: Little Rock, and so I lived in Little Rock and had responsibility for the state and so it was...and that, in fact, was one of the great things when I was there. I was there for two years, a little over two years and while I was there, I was honored to get the Business Leader of the Year Award and that's...

Blanche Touhill: And that was an important award?

Cynthia Brinkley: You know, it really was because it said a lot to me about coming into an environment where you don't know anyone; they don't know you. You look a little different than everybody else but it also showed that if you work hard and just be yourself, that you can be recognized for those things. So I was very, very honored to get that recognition. I thought it was terrific. It was given by the University of Arkansas, Little Rock, and so it was an annual thing that they do and so being a part of that was just a real honor for me. So I was there for two-and-a-half years and then SBC had a way of moving people around, you know, particularly senior executives, and so, since I grew up in Missouri, I was then asked to come to Missouri and be President of SBC for Missouri...

Blanche Touhill: Let me ask you something there: Why do they keep moving people? I know they do...

Cynthia Brinkley: You know, they don't do it so much anymore. Part of it was just the recognition that you're a corporate asset and you go where your talent and skills are needed. So I think it was really two-fold: one, you go where your talent and skills are needed, and secondly, that was, I think, Ed Whittaker's way of developing people. So you had different assignments and it's a different way...it also kept things so fresh because you'd come in with new eyes and you could change things up. Sometimes it's good; sometimes it's not so good, right? But I think that was the reason why in

terms of moving people around. Now, it kind of lessened off in the last few years, I understand. We didn't move people quite as much as we had been but it was...and I think that can be just corporate life in general. You just kind of get moved around.

Blanche Touhill: So you're now in Missouri...

Cynthia Brinkley: I'm now in Missouri. I'm in my home state and it's wonderful. It's a wonderful place to be because it's great to move to a place where you're familiar with so many things. You know where some of these small towns are; you understand the dynamics and that helps a lot. So we had a lot of challenges within the state. We had just gotten into the long distance business, which was great but we had other issues to deal with. One, we were trying to introduce a new service which we now call U-Verse but it was video service and typically you would have to go city by city by city by city to get a license to provide the video service which would take years, to do that. So we wanted to go directly to the state and see if we could get a statewide franchise. So we worked on that and was successful, not the first year but it took a couple of years and were able to get that accomplished as well as change some of the other regulations that put us more at parity with our competitors because at the time, we were kind of regulated more than our competitors would be and so getting those in place and then working within the community was important for SBC/AT&T, to be a big part of the community.

Blanche Touhill: Do they do that all over the country?

Cynthia Brinkley: Yes. That's...

Blanche Touhill: That's part of the role of the president?

Cynthia Brinkley: Part of the role. I mean, not everybody does it. It's not the primary...

Blanche Touhill: Well, at least it would be a [inaudible 45:29] that would do it?

Cynthia Brinkley: Well, yeah, because it's important, not only for the reputation of the company, it's also important for the sales of the company; it's also important for how the company is regulated and viewed. So it's important and the company has a philosophy that if the community does well, then we believe the company does well. So it's important to play those roles. So that was a part of it as well.

Blanche Touhill: Were your parents waiting for you to start a small business?

Cynthia Brinkley: You know, I have a brother who's a superintendant and then I have a brother who's a big cattle rancher; he has his own business, obviously and he specializes with genetics with cattle and a brother who has an excavating business and then my sister is a little more nomadic and she's actually a truck driver now. So I think everybody, it's kind of, small business has been a part of our DNA, for lack of a better word. So I think they were very proud of me. They just were...they weren't any more proud of me than they were of any of my other siblings because everybody was successful in their own way.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, and doing what they wanted to do?

Cynthia Brinkley: And doing what they wanted to do, and that's, I think, what...that was what was important to them, was...

Blanche Touhill: What change did you make in Missouri successfully that you're very proud of?

Cynthia Brinkley: Well, I think certainly, from a company standpoint, changing the laws so we could provide video service; changing the laws and working with policy makers to make it more business-friendly. So those two aspects were very, very huge. I'd like to think that I played a role within the community in terms of making the community better. I was...

Blanche Touhill: You were a part of civic progress?

Cynthia Brinkley: I was a part civic progress. I was on the Federal Reserve board. I was chairman of the St. Louis Symphony so worked...when we were going through our strife and all of that, and several other organizations. I helped University of Missouri, was one of the co-chairs for their billion dollar campaign and I was chairman of the Hawthorn Foundation for Missouri which is an organization, really brings business together. So I'd like to think that the company and I, through the company, played a role in moving the state forward and making it a better place for everybody.

Blanche Touhill: Then you were transferred to San Antonio?

Cynthia Brinkley: Then what happened was, we had just acquired Bell South which gave us all of Cingular. At the time, we owned 60% of Cingular which was the wireless arm and Bell South owned 40%. Now, back up a little bit: we had

acquired AT&T. We bought AT&T Wireless a couple years prior and then, about a year later, we bought AT&T proper. So that's when we changed our name to AT&T, so after we bought AT&T, we changed our name to AT&T and then was able to acquire Bell South, which gave us all of Cingular. So it was at that time, Ed Whittaker retired and Randall Stevenson took over. So the company had changed quite a bit. We'd grown. We had over 300,000 employees. We were a wire line, wireless, trying to put all this together. So I went to what was then San Antonio, the Corporate Headquarters to assume a new position that had not been around. It was the Senior Vice President in charge of Talent and Development and the Chief Diversity Officer for the company. So, really, what I was charged with doing was helping create AT&T University, which would be not only our leadership development tool, but also a platform that the chairman could use to help...we had to build culture, not just change culture. We really had to define culture and who we were going to be now that we had this brand new company. Also, I had responsibility for all the training for the company, all of the learning efforts which were pretty massive and then also, it's Chief Diversity Officer which I was the first Chief Diversity Officer that they had named. So it was a wonderful opportunity and I had a fantastic team and was able to, with their great work, put all this together and it was a great success and going well today.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful!

Cynthia Brinkley: Yeah, it's doing very well. So three years into that, one day I get a call and it's from General Motors asking if I would come up and run their Global Human Resources and I thought, no, I'm not so interested in that. It's not really what I'm looking...it's not really...I'm fine where I am and they said, "Well, we're really not looking for a traditional HR person," because I certainly wasn't..."We're looking really for more a person with a business background to help change the culture of the company. We're looking for someone to help in the transformation." Well, say "transformation" to me and that's like catnip. So I thought, well, it can't hurt to go talk. Ironically, I had just become retirement-eligible at AT&T. So I talked to them and talked to my brothers, really, in terms of who I counseled with and I thought, you know, this might be a really interesting opportunity and a way to help an American icon and certainly be...just to be a part of history. So I moved to Detroit and I ran the Global Human Resources

function for General Motors for about two years and it was a great opportunity, great company, great to learn about a new industry. The automotive industry compared to telecom couldn't be more different but it was really educational. People always say, "What was your biggest surprise about being there?" Really, I think I had two: one was, it is very complicated, to design, build and sell a car and do that in such a global scale which clearly General Motors is such a global company. Secondly, it was...I don't want to say surprising...it was just, like, awe-inspiring, to see how many just phenomenally just gifted, bright employees there were there, just a terrific group of employees. So these truly rocket scientists in some respects. So, getting to know them and working with them was just a really...a great delight.

Blanche Touhill: And Ed Whittaker, by that time...

Cynthia Brinkley: He was gone. He had left.

Blanche Touhill: He was gone?

Cynthia Brinkley: Oh, yeah, he'd been gone about a year, whenever I came...

Blanche Touhill: When you arrived?

Cynthia Brinkley: Mm-hmm, yes, when I...yeah, because he had gone there and he was there a year and then had been gone a year whenever I came on board, uh-huh, yeah. So it was great.

Blanche Touhill: Was it a head hunter who found you?

Cynthia Brinkley: Yeah, it was actually. It was a company that was here in St. Louis that I had known the owner of, who owned the company and he knew me and he thought I'd be a good fit for them, for the role.

Blanche Touhill: Let me change the subject for just a minute and would you talk about the IWF and what you've gotten out of that organization?

Cynthia Brinkley: You know, I've had the privilege to be in several different IWFs. I started in Arkansas. That's where I became a member and one of the first things that struck me about IWF is, I just thought, wow, we have some quality women in this organization. It was...I had to use the over used word "awesome" but it really was and the lofty ideas and how it was...it was up here; it wasn't down here. I mean, ideas were discussed, ways to get

ahead, ways to get ahead for everybody. I mean, to make the world a better place, and I love that. So, the next place I was...was here in Missouri and, again, the same thing: being involved with the women, and I love that we have what we call "dine-arounds" where you have any opportunity to really get to know women and I think what I really love about IWF is it's the great dot connector, right? I mean, you know someone here who knows someone there who knows someone there and pretty soon, you could run the world, right, through this. Then I had the opportunity to be involved in Michigan, when I was there and that, again...and I'm still friends with women that I met there, just, again, incredibly accomplished women who are like-minded and working...you know, everybody's working in the same direction, trying to advance the cause of women and trying to make it in a way that's sustainable and in a way that really raises the boat for everybody, raises the bar for everybody. So it's been a terrific organization. I'm happy to be a part of it.

Blanche Touhill: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what would your life be like?

Cynthia Brinkley: Well, you know, 50 years earlier, I would not have had the choices that I have today, I don't think. We're blessed with having the ability to do so many different things and I think I would have had a life that was probably more restrictive and more planned out. It definitely would have been children, marriage, maybe staying on the farm, maybe those type things. So I think it would have been restrictive. On the other hand, 50 years earlier, I could have been involved in the suffrage movement and I think that would have been a very exciting time to be alive and I cannot imagine that I would not have taken a front seat in that activity. So I think it would work both ways: I think you're limited but I also think it presents great opportunities to be involved in something bigger than yourself.

Blanche Touhill: Would you like to comment about this taping and the future of women?

Cynthia Brinkley: You know, I think the future, in a nutshell, is bright because I think what you're seeing is I think you're seeing a stronger feminization within the world. I think there's a recognition that, oh, my gosh, women make 70% of the purchasing decisions, right? They're huge players in all this and those companies that don't buy into this and don't recognize this, that don't get their boards with 50% women or just don't recognize this, they're not going to be successful. I mean, the research proves this out. And so I think we're going to move forward. I think we're going to move

forward at an accelerated pace and so I'm very optimistic about where we are. I think we'll look back on this time at some point and say, gosh, remember that? That seems so foreign to us now, to think it was an anomaly, to have a board of 50% women or to think about marketing directly to. So I'm very optimistic about that because I think we are seeing a...see change. I'd love it if we could call it a real revolution. I think we're calling it more of an accelerated evolution but I think we will definitely get there.

Blanche Touhill: Thank you very much.

Cynthia Brinkley: Thank you.