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MAXINE CLARK INTERVIEWED BY BLANCHE TOUHILL

Blanche Touhill: I'd like you to introduce yourself and just give a two or three minutes...who you are and why you're here.

Maxine Clark: Okay. My name is Maxine Clark and I am probably best known for being the founder of Build-A-Bear Workshop but, in fact, I've had a long retail career and a career since leaving my chief executive officer role of Build-A-Wear Workshop, to expand my entrepreneurial skills to helping other women and minority entrepreneurs as well as trying to retailize and revolutionize public urban education.

Blanche Touhill: Why don't you talk a little bit about where you were born and your family and your elementary school. Was it a teacher that said to you, you really have ability and you should go on to college, or was it an uncle or an aunt or a mother or what was it in your early childhood that made you focus on being somebody?

Maxine Clark: That's a great question. I was born in Miami, Florida and my parents were first generation Americans. They did not have a college education. They had a high school education but they had a really good education and my mother was a very smart woman. They grew up in New York. They met in Albany, New York where they were both raised and my mother, you could take the regents exams in New York State and sort of test yourself out of high school, so she actually graduated from high school at almost 15 years old and went to work for the governor of New York which was Franklin Delano Roosevelt and she was Eleanor Roosevelt's travelling secretary. When Eleanor Roosevelt...Eleanor and Franklin moved to Washington, my mother moved with her as well to become her travelling secretary which, that's all she did. If she was in Washington, my mother didn't work for her but she travelled a lot so that was a good thing. My mother was an excellent secretary. She was very smart. We had piles and piles of stenography pads that nobody could really read except her

because not only did she do stenography but she made up her own shorthand but she took incredible notes and she was very detail-oriented. She was also incredibly creative. My father learned his craft, he was an electrician in the military. He was in the Coast Guard in Miami, Florida and when my mom was living in D.C. during the war, my dad was living in Miami. They would meet occasionally as you got leave. I have some wonderful pictures of them and their friends that they made in the military. When the war was over, my parents moved to Miami, Florida. My father loved being stationed there and it was a land of opportunity and my mother moved there and she went to work immediately prior to myself being born, my sister and myself being born, to work for Rose Kennedy and she was introduced to Rose Kennedy through Eleanor Roosevelt and worked particularly with children with Down Syndrome, mental retardation and the Kennedy's had a daughter who had been diagnosed as mentally retarded. She wasn't Down Syndrome but my mother got particularly interested in this and while she called herself a social worker, I didn't know that she was not a licensed social worker so much but she worked with people who set up a school for children with Down Syndrome particularly and they became advocates for Down Syndrome. My father had a, I'd say, not so successful business. My father always thought his ship was going to come in. Somewhere over the rainbow was brighter than the moment and he was a very optimistic person. He always was looking forward and I think that I inherited that from my father. My mother was a more practical person but she had, I think, great dreams for my sister and myself. It was just that she wanted us to have our own dreams and we were always encouraged to be creative and to be questioning. The only time I remember my mother ever going to school for me in all the years I was in school, including college, was when my 3rd grade teacher wrote on my report card that I asked too many questions. My mother thought that was absurd for a 9-year-old child not to be able to ask a lot of questions and so I remember her being so mad when she read that report card and I was scared because my mother was mad about my report card. Everything else about it was good except that I had asked too many questions. I would say that my parents did encourage me to be good in school. That was a high standard, but I don't know that they ever really talked that much about going to college. I don't know that they thought that it was that necessary in my early part of my life. I was born in 1949. I graduated from

high school in 1967. While most of my friends were going to college, the junior college movement was expanding and lots of people were saying, "Let's go for a couple years to Miami Day Junior College." I did not want to do that but I did not have a plan of how I was going to pay for it. I didn't know any of that, and actually, my teachers were probably the most encouraging for me to fulfill my full potential, starting with my 1st grade teacher, Mrs. Grace, who was a wonderful teacher. One of the things that she used to do that really dictated my future in a way that I could never have known then but know now is every Friday at about 2:15, she would go up to her pencil sharpener...it was one of those on the wall that had that...like it was carving your pencil and that noise that kind of sent shivers up your spine...and she would sharpen her pencil really sharp and to a 1st grader, a sharp pencil was like a weapon or reward. You had to look at it both ways and when we went to 1st grade, you didn't know how to read yet. That was the 1st grade teacher's job, to teach you to read and you might have been knowing how to write your name but you certainly had a long way to go and Mrs. Grace used to give the pencil away every Friday afternoon to the child in the class that made the most mistakes that week. It was a reward for raising your hand, so to speak and the status symbol in my 1st grade class was, in a little cigar box that we had of our supplies, was how many red pencils you had and I had a lot because I loved school. I loved to read. I loved to ask questions and I was just in my element, you know, "Oh, Teacher, I know the answer; I know the answer," but she didn't call on me all the time because she had to call on other people and she also gave you chances...she didn't call on you when she thought you always knew the answer. She could tell. She had a certain way about her and she was a wonderful teacher and later, when I started in the retail business in 1972, on the selling floor, the first thing they gave me was a red pencil to go mark down some merchandise. That was before computers and all those things. And the light bulb went on and I realized that...I asked the department manager, what was this for and she was, "Well, we made some mistakes this season and we have to mark them down," and it felt like, aha, and I think that was also a moment where I realized that there's this connection between what you learned all these 16 years prior, to what you're going to do today. I had teachers that I didn't like that I learned a lot from and teachers that I loved that I learned a lot from. The next teacher that was probably the most influential to me was my science teacher, Mr. (Bosves?) in 5th grade.

He loved science and I just didn't have an interest in it but he was determined to have me have an interest in it and he kept me after school one day and he asked me why I didn't like it and I think that, you know, this was a man before his time because, here I was, a girl in the class, they could have ignored me but he really got me inspired and I entered the 5th grade science fair and I actually won from our school and he drove me to the science fair, to Dade County Science Fair, very excited that he had a person who'd made it to the big fair. I didn't win but I came out with an Honorable Mention and it changed the way I looked at science because he taught me that it was about problem-solving, not about chemistry or memorizing formulas or any of that. That might not be the way I would relate to science but, for me, science was going to be about thinking about a problem and then finding a way to solve it and using the other tools that were in my toolkit: my good writing skills; my speaking skills; my math skills, together to bring it to a problem/solution. He was a great teacher and I loved having him as a teacher. Then, I had other really good teachers but it was...different times too. When I was in 9th grade, President Kennedy was shot and that was a really big time. I was actually in my 9th grade geometry class and I remember it like it was yesterday and I think the way we were taught after that really changed pretty dramatically because there was a background, something important in history that you were there for, that you could relate to and everything sort of seemed to change there and we all came to be more immersed in our community because of it, more together, maybe more apart in some other ways. But that was a really big turning point. Then in high school, my journalism teacher, Mrs. Adams, who was a wonderful teacher, I was the editor of the high school newspaper and she gave us total creative freedom. Every year, whoever was the editor of the Year Book or the newspaper could do what they wanted and she saw in me a little bit of, I think, a rebel, that I had a lot of political interests and I was willing to take a subject and dig in. I wasn't a person satisfied with just the answer they gave you. I wanted to know why was it like that, and one good thing that...a lot of times, with your child, it can get beat out of you. Your parents say, "Just do it; we'll explain it later" and they never explain it but my parents were really good at explaining and I was always allowed to ask questions. So she fed me a story, an interesting story...this was 1966...about teacher pay and why teachers, at our school anyway, were paid less than the janitorial staff and it wasn't that she thought the

janitors should make less money but that she wanted to understand...wanted me to understand why were the teachers paid less and so I went about my research on this. When I think about it, then, looking at, now, what you have for research, it's so easy to just press it into a computer and put the subject and, poof, everything comes. I took it really seriously and I did write a really good editorial about it. I wasn't very popular with the janitors at the school but I was quite popular with the teachers. My teacher entered that essay or my editorial in the Columbia Scholastic Press Association contest, editorial contest and I won and I won enough money to go to a four-year state university and, thanks to her. I don't know what I would have done. I probably would have gone to Miami Day Junior College, worked part-time and paid my way to eventually transfer to a state university but I got a great education. I was a journalism major in college and I thought I was going to be the editor of the New York Times or a civil rights attorney. There were so many options because every day, the unimaginable was happening: rockets to the moon and heart transplants and Disney Land and Disney World opened. There was nothing to keep me from thinking I couldn't be part of this. I never felt I couldn't be. No one ever told me I couldn't be and I was always small. I think that was an advantage for me, so no matter who the person was, male or female, they were taller than me. I had to look up to them so I had a respect for authority and a respect for people who might be larger than me, but I didn't think they were necessarily smarter than me or that they could be any better than me but I certainly had respect for that and I was always asking a lot of questions. That's a constant through my life and I think curiosity is one of those things that really...if somebody says, "What was the one thing that you had that you think helped you in your life?" it was being curious: curious about people; curious about events; curious about why things worked the way they work, and in those questions, you get to learn a lot of things and people like you to ask questions. So that editorial changed my life. I went to the University of Florida, started at the University of Florida but I graduated from the University of Georgia because they actually allowed women in the Business School and I wanted to take business classes. One of my professors told me that they had a really good program and I transferred there. They had a better journalism program also and I decided when I was there though that I thought I might want to be a civil rights attorney. I was really serious about it. Now, this is 1968 to '70, times are very

tumultuous in America and the Civil Rights Movement has really taken on a lot of power and earlier, about 1963 and 4, actually, my mother, who was a civil rights activist, she was mostly active for children with Down Syndrome and children with different abilities, she called it, but she really was about anybody who was under represented. So we would be going to rallies; we would be going to League of Women Voters and I would sit with my mother while she registered voters; we would stand on the corner with whoever the candidate was at the moment, particularly a Democratic candidate; I went with my mother to the convention that was held in Miami Beach. So all throughout my life, I was exposed to kind of wow moments, although I was probably pretty perturbed to be going to them. I don't remember that so much now. I know that I wasn't always so excited but my mother wanted me to go with her and I went with her and we had a great time but it was hard getting me there. But now I look back on it, I think, what a lucky break. So I was in college and I went to the University of Georgia and pretty much around the University of Georgia in 1970 and '71, it was not long before that they just had admitted the first black students and I just couldn't kind of fathom that. I didn't know really because I went to high school in an integrated high school and I never thought about whether black students would come to a state university. So I really did a lot of studying on that and I decided I did want to be a civil rights attorney but I had to find the money to pay for it. So, I went to work. I had to go to work and one of my business professors was a consultant in the retail business, Dr. Carter. He was a wonderful teacher. He opened up the world of commerce to me and how I could use my talents and my writing ability and my curiosity in merchandising and marketing. He told me that I could go to work in one of the training programs. So I looked at a city that I thought had a lot of law schools so Washington, D.C. was that city and it had politics and I wanted to go to Washington, D.C. and my mother had lived there during World War II and she talked about it all the time. So I went to Washington, D.C. and I applied for a job and I knew there were about 11 law schools that I could go to and I got to this executive training program now...there's some interesting stories, how I got my job there because they told me that they didn't have any room and I went down the street to Woodward & Lothrop which was a competing store and while I was there, they told me that the woman...they knocked on the door for the person who was interviewing me and said, "Guess what? The person down the street just

got fired for a job,” they said her name and for some reason, I wanted to work there, at the head company in Washington. I wanted to work there more than I wanted to work at this fairly ritzy department store. So I went back down the street and I called on the phone from the main lobby of the department store and I said I was there for my interview and they said, “Well, I’m sorry, Dell doesn’t work here anymore” and I said, “Well, is there anybody else that could interview me?” So, just to be nice to me, they said, “Yes, we’ll have Mr. Mott meet you in the restaurant of the department store.” So I went to the restaurant and met this man. He was very tall and he sat down and talked to me. He had no interest in hiring me but while we were sitting there, the CEO of the store, Allen Bluestein, came in and he sat down next to us and he started asking me questions and he said to Stanley Mott, he said, “Hire her and pay her \$100 more a month than you paid the last person you hired.” So I had a job and I didn’t even know what the job was but I was accepted into the executive training program in the May Department Stores at their head company branch. A couple weeks later, I was doing my job, I loved it; it was very interesting but I still was going to law school and Stanley Goodman, who was the chairman of the May Department Stores made a visit, one of his famous visits and he spoke to us in an auditorium and my life changed forever that day because I’m small and I sat in the front row, like I often did and we had eye contact. So I thought he was talking to me alone. Of course he wasn’t but he said, “Retailing is entertainment and the store is a stage and when the customer has fun, they spend more money,” and that was one of those moments, again, when all my learning kind of came together because I was in marketing classes and business classes and writing classes and, of course, that’s what you try to do, is convince someone, whether it’s a law brief, that somebody...to go your way. You’re convincing and I realized that this could be really fun. I liked to shop. I didn’t have much money but I liked to shop. This might be for me. I went up to Stanley Goodman after that presentation and I introduced myself and about six months later, I was working here in St. Louis, Missouri. They transferred me to St. Louis, Missouri and I was really lucky to get a job here and get exposed to the...actually, it wasn’t about six months, about a year-and-a-half later and Stanley Goodman had actually turned the reins over to David Farrell. So I came to work for David Farrell here in St. Louis and that was the beginning of my real work career. All of that education, incredibly relevant. I think I used what I learned in school

every single day in my job because I was taught to communicate and communication is what you do. You are taught to listen and you have to listen to people and hear what they're saying and then you have to put those ideas together to solve problems. So I feel very fortunate that...I always did love school, but I love it more as I look back on it because it really enabled me to be the person that I am today.

Blanche Touhill: Go back a little and let me ask a couple of questions and then I do want to talk about Stanley Goodman and David Farrell and the May Company. You told me in another conversation about the trip you made with your mother. Would you talk a little bit about that?

Maxine Clark: Well, during the civil rights era, my mother was taking me, predominantly...my sister, she doesn't have any memory of it and I don't remember her being there either. She was two years younger than me and I think she was just young enough that my mother felt she should stay home, but she took me with her and we rode the bus...well, we rode the bus downtown all the time to go downtown and we would sit at the Woolworth's counter. We would always sit where there were African Americans and my mother would just insist on sitting there. Sometimes they would wait on us and sometimes they wouldn't and we would take the bus and we'd sit on the back of the bus and it wasn't much of a statement but I never thought about it because my mother didn't say, "Hey, we're supposed to be sitting in the front, let's sit in the back." We got on the bus, in front of the bus, paid our money and moved to the back of the bus and I just thought that's where we sat just because that was where it was comfortable but I found out later that that was not a right...I could pick wherever I wanted to sit on the bus and my mother could pick but the other African American people on the bus didn't have a choice. My mother said, "We're going on a trip," we packed a suitcase and we were going to Selma, Alabama and we went with a whole bunch of other people from Miami that were very much in this movement, black and white. I don't remember at the time if there were any Hispanic people, although we had a lot of friends of our family that were Cuban and had migrated to Miami, but I don't remember that so much. We took the bus, it was a long trip, to up Florida which is a pretty long state, to Selma, Alabama where we were greeted by riotist crowds and policemen galore and also very angry people, very, very angry. I remember when we were actually...a bunch of my mother's friends were arrested, my

mother, too, and I had to go with them and we were sitting inside of a jail cell. Eventually they let us out. We weren't there very long. I wasn't really scared. It was just sort of a wow moment, like, what's going on here? What are these people doing? And you learn to absorb your parents' politics a little bit because they wouldn't bring you along...I didn't know enough to disagree with my mother. I wouldn't have disagreed with her in this particular case. I might have in some others but I just couldn't believe it, that this was going on because people wanted the right to vote and people wanted the right to go to equal schools because in my community, we were all going to school together and we had great schools. So I wasn't sure about why all this was happening but I knew that my mother wanted it to be different and I, therefore, wanted it to be different. So, it was a pretty interesting experience because I can remember it and when I speak to people today about these issues...and I'm very much involved in trying to move our urban education dramatically...I know that I have more experience with it than some of the people who are African American but that's not something you can say. There's a lot of difference just because your skin color is different. People treat you different and even though my beginnings were very humble and my parents did not have any money, we probably would have been in the free and reduced lunch program if the economy was like it is now. I just thought that we were all equal, that we were all brought up to be equal and I think that racism is something that's taught, you're not born to it, and in my case, my parents taught me that I was just one of many, many people...thousands of people put on this earth, millions, and there was no better and no worse and I had my own abilities and I could do with that what I wanted. It was a life-changing moment. I never even thought about any other attitude about freedom but I did learn that day that people didn't automatically have it, that just because you lived in America didn't mean that you were given the same rights, that there were people with prejudices and biases and just because I was white, people that didn't know anything about me wanted me to go out of the jail cell and people that they didn't know either, just because their skin was black, had to stay in the jail cell. That was a ridiculous moment and that's why I think I was really motivated to think about a civil rights attorney job. But I think that, in our own way, all of the work that we do, whether we're business people or educators or doctors or lawyers, we're out for the rights of people, then we're doing civil rights work. So I've

always had an inclination towards equality. Of course, as a young woman growing up, life was a lot different then than it is now but not so much because it was, like, women's liberation or any of that, although I have considered myself part of the women's movement, it was because it was the right thing to do, not just for another woman, but for a disabled person, for an African American, a Hispanic, but none of those outward symbols to other people dictated what we were on the inside and that we should be given a chance to be as successful as we were, and I think I had another sensibility about it because having been a young woman...although I don't remember ever being truly discriminated against, might have been but no one ever discriminated against me to my face. Maybe because I was short, I remember a lot of times having to go up to a podium and they were always too tall for me but beyond that, I didn't feel discriminated against. I felt it was my opportunity, my ability to be all that I could be and I think that was taught to me by every teacher, even the ones, as I said earlier, that I didn't like so much. They taught me something not to do or not to be and I value all of that. So I do think that we're all a product of our surroundings and our parent influences. That's what it's supposed to be and the same goes true: if your parents aren't influencing you in a positive way, you can take a turn for the negative. But in my world, my village, was a much bigger one than just my parents. It was my next-door neighbors, my teachers, my cousins...we didn't have a particularly large family but when we did get together, they were different than us; they lived in a different part of town. We got to taste different food and do all kinds of things. It was always a road towards the journey. I knew I was on a journey. I always knew that and I knew that I didn't want to be an anonymous person in this world, that I was given abilities and that it was up to me to do as much with those abilities as I could and that if I wanted to, if Walt Disney could do it, I could do it; I could change the world. There was nothing to stop me. We were living in that kind of economic environment of opportunity and possibility.

Blanche Touhill: When you got out of jail back in Selma, did I understand that the black people on the bus had to remain in the jail?

Maxine Clark: I don't know where all of the people disbursed to but there wasn't room for everybody and not everybody could stay in a hotel either because the hotels discriminated against African Americans. That's why I don't think

there were any Hispanics. I don't remember seeing any signs that said, "Hispanics not..." ...but it said, "No Negroes allowed," that was the word or "Colored people not allowed" and then the water fountains were marked for colored only or white only. There were so many kinds and I noticed those things much more. My tentacles were much more about that but we were separated but we were still doing our work. The next day or maybe a day after we got on the bus and came back home, there was just lots of hubbub about it. There were lots of secret meetings on the bus, people sitting and talking. They weren't plotting anything. They were just really talking about what we had accomplished and I think what they had accomplished. I was just sort of along for the ride but I was about 14 so I did know what was going on. It left a huge impact on me because I did see people holding hands, walking across the bridge, black and white who really did care about the same things and it was not at all about a women's movement. It may have been like what it was for the suffragettes when the women's vote but I certainly wasn't there then but it was a solidarity, there was a certain solidarity and nobody said, "Go away, little white girl" or anything like that, none of the leaders. I don't remember seeing...if I walked past John Lewis, I wouldn't have known who he was but I believe we were there at the same time and there were so many thousands of people there that it was like an ocean of people and energy and excitement.

Blanche Touhill: Where did the black people stay who had gone to Selma if they couldn't get in the hotels?

Maxine Clark: Some people stayed on the bus, I think, and some people stayed with friends, with other black families in the neighborhood, the church. I remember when we came into the church, it looked like people had been sleeping on the church pews and I had never been in a Baptist church before. It was absolutely magnificent. It was just beautiful and it was alive and there was food. The local people that lived there had brought food and everybody was dressed up. In those days, even when you went to a peaceful riot, you were dressed up. People were wearing suits and dresses and I remember being dressed up and I didn't want to get my dress dirty and worried about that at 14 years old, no matter what. But it was really surreal because...

Blanche Touhill: Well, in those days, people were bombing the buses too.

Maxine Clark: Oh, yes, they did, not our bus because we came from Miami but the buses that came from Nashville and Washington, D.C., they sort of preceded us and I think they called in...President Johnson had called in the people at the time to stop whatever it was, it was President Johnson, to stop doing this. They were unarmed, the people on the buses all were unarmed and peaceful. Later, when I saw a recreation of this experience from some students at Fiske University, which was in Nashville, an all-black university, it was real for me. I could remember it. It was like that and sitting at the counter with my mother was like that. The memory is really strong. You know how there are some memories that you have in your life that you were sort of disappointed in when you go to see them, like when I saw the David...the David, that fit my image, but when I went to the Liberty Bell, it looked so much smaller than I thought it was in the books, but the historic recounts of this were very real. Every one I've read and seen is very real and I feel it. I'm sad that there's a generation that doesn't really know about this and I think last year...about a year ago, a year-and-a-half ago, with Trayvon Martin, that that kind of issue that many years ago would have stirred up a lot more people. We would have just been appalled that anything like that could happen in our country.

Blanche Touhill: Why hasn't it stirred up more people?

Maxine Clark: On the one hand, I think that it hasn't stirred up more people because everyone takes the relationships with their neighbors, diverse neighbors and diverse friends, for granted and you just think, well, this isn't an issue because my friends are black or Hispanic. I would never do that, and you know that you have a say in this so you can determine your life and how you want to be with your friends. The other side of it is that it's somebody else; it's not me; it's Florida; it's not Missouri, but it is. It's our children. When I heard his mother say on the news that that was her son and I said, he's our son because this is a young man that had all kinds of prospects for opportunity and they were just taken away and somebody else was favored over his story. He doesn't have a story. He wasn't there to tell his story. We don't exactly know what happened. But people would have been up in arms about it. But I do think that it did have...because of the social media that we have today, there is another way to voice your opinion and join in in a movement that is not the same as having been there. But I miss the having been there. I think that getting on a plane and going or getting on a bus and going to Florida, to

Sanford, Florida to be there during the trial, I should have done that. You know, it was one of those things my mother would have done but it wasn't what I did and I think that it doesn't mean I wasn't watching it fervently and paying attention and advocating for Trayvon and talking to our children in our schools about it because I think it's something that they need to be thinking about but it seems like, in 2013 or 2014 now, we shouldn't have to still be talking about equality.

Blanche Touhill: Did your mother ever speak about Eleanor or Rose Kennedy?

Maxine Clark: Oh, yes, all the time. I remember when Hillary Clinton talked a little bit about communing with Eleanor Roosevelt, I thought, she has nothing on my mother because my mother constantly quoted her. I have pictures of my mother with her and always there were women in the pictures, always there were...most of her pictures that she took at events that she went to where she was traveling with my mother, they were always about the rights of people who were under represented and so whenever she could, she would gather up a group of women and the women were her close advisors as well. So she talked about her all the time, what a good person, Eleanor this, Mrs. Roosevelt this, Mrs. Roosevelt that, all the time, I heard about it and Rose Kennedy too, although when John Kennedy ran for president, I think that changed things even though my mother was very involved in that. We weren't friends of theirs. My mother was somebody who was employed or worked with her in some of her charity work but she was very much supportive of the Kennedy family and the Kennedy run for office and, again, on the street corners, wearing my Kennedy/Johnson buttons and my banners and I still have those, by the way. I've kept them near and dear to my heart. So I think it was a really great experience, the process for electing a president is and what you have to know. Now, my mother told me what she wanted me to know but I felt like I was pretty well informed, at least for a child of the times, of 12 years old or whatever I was when he first ran for office as president of the United States. Of course, it was a very wonderful time to be growing up and be enchanted by politics as well as...maybe not so realistic, but to believe in the hope and the future and I remember, too, I can remember all those points in time after that too, when the astronauts walked on the moon, I was a summer camp counselor and we were all listening by the radio, by the transistor radio for the landing on the moon and those moments and we cheered and everybody was so

excited. We were engaged in this incredible mission that was declared for a vision, that was declared for by our president. I felt a little closer to it because my mother had a connection but I did not meet Rose Kennedy but when I met Hillary Clinton, I did tell her the story and she laughed and I showed her my mother's pictures because she was in our house and I showed her the pictures and she was just really curious to know more and I said, "I've been waiting to tell you this because I thought you might be interested to know," and she's, "Oh, my gosh, this is amazing. You should treasure these pictures" and my mother wrote on some of the pictures, who was who in the picture, I guess so she would remember. So I was a very lucky child. My mother was a very open person and my dad was a wonderful person. They were very different. My dad had great stories. He was a storyteller. I don't mean telling false stories but jokes and he could connect with people through humor and he was great at that. He was a great salesman and he was just a totally different personality, not at all particularly activist, although I think he certainly knew that we were having meetings at our house about political issues and one of the things, too, that was also true is that my mother ran a school for children with Down Syndrome and in those days people didn't openly acknowledge that they had children with Down Syndrome. So we had children left on our doorstep that my mother would take into her care and the care of their school and my sister and I spent a lot of time at that school with my mother. So we got to see what goes on for differently abled children and this was not a prison or reformatory or any kind of an institution. It was a school, a boarding school but most of these children did not have parents that acknowledged that they existed so it may as well have been an orphanage but we didn't look at it like that because it was a lovely place. My mother was a pioneer in helping children with Down Syndrome, particularly teenage children adapt to life, to be able to be self-sufficient, as self-sufficient as they could be, so learning to use the bus system, and that was another time, going on the bus with my mother, which was often. She didn't drive. We took the bus everywhere. She would teach the children how to use the bus and people would make fun of them and they would automatically sit in the back of the bus. My mother taught them to sit in the back of the bus because she wanted them to always have friends that would be with them and she knew that the African American people that were on the bus were going to be friendly to them. The sheltered workshop concept was being

pioneered during my mother's time. Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops, learning skills that you could use in a workplace. So those were all kinds of things that were happening at that time and my mother was very front and center for equal rights for everyone.

Blanche Touhill: Now, let's skip back up to Stanley Goodman. So you finished the executive training program, is that what happened?

Maxine Clark: Yeah, mm-hmm. I finished the executive training program and I was a buyer in sportswear and I did have an intermittent experience which was a good one but I got to meet Dave Farrell when he came to Washington, D.C. to make his tour of duty and we had a great conversation in my department for about an hour, which was a long time for him. I was a sportswear buyer but I wasn't shy. My parents had friends that were...I was always exposed to older people and I never thought that they were any different than me. They were just older but I was always comfortable sitting in on the adult conversations and so I would just keep the conversation going. He probably thought I was a little too chatty but that was after his visit. About six months later was when they asked me to transfer to St. Louis to work on his staff. There was a transition between Stanley and Dave and Dave had a very different vision for the company, taking it to the next level but Stanley and I always had a wonderful relationship and a couple times he invited me over to his home where he would have famous musicians and speakers come and they would just talk about a subject and he invited me and I think he took to me because I was vulnerable. I was just a young person. I was open. I was easy to talk to. We had similar background, religious background. We talked about that sometimes. He'd see me on the elevator when he moved his office up to a higher floor in the Railway Exchange Building and he said, "What's going on? Tell me what's going on?" but one fun thing that he used to do if we were on an airplane together, before the May Company had their corporate jets, and we would fly together and go to New York. If he saw me sitting in coach, he would come and trade seats with the person next to me and he'd sit with me in coach because he really wanted to find out what was going on but everyone loved it. We got a kick out of it. He was such a real person and he was truly a renaissance man. He cared about the community; he cared about art and music and how it played into the bigger picture of St. Louis but also of work, of retailing, of design and product. He always was encouraging women and later I met Yula Fulton

who was a buyer for him here in St. Louis. I did not know her when I was in Washington and we would have long stories about this and she was also a woman who inspired me because she was allowed to be her most creative self. I think she started as a junior for young teenager girls, buyer, and then she worked her way up to better sportswear and she had a shop in Clayton that he gave her the space to do with it what she wanted and that just doesn't happen anymore. But I got to see that and I knew that it's possible to have imagination and to think up for the customer, to give them more opportunity to go out of their circle, out of their comfort zone through fashion.

Blanche Touhill: So you were at the May Company for years and then you decided to start your own business. So would you talk a little bit about that.

Maxine Clark: Yes. One thing about working at the May Company and working in general, which I tell young people all the time, is I think that what's really important is to love what you do and do what you love and that's passion and I was lucky enough to have discovered that after Stanley [inaudible 38:44] in the May Company and I really, most days, felt like I should be paying them, not them paying me and when that changed, when that dynamic started to change, I realized it was time for me to do something else. Also, Dave Farrell had announced that he was retiring and lots of things were changing. So it was a really good opportunity. I had been promoted up the ladder of Famous Bar and Venture and then to Payless Shoe Stores, the President of Payless Shoe Stores, which was the largest division of the May Company. So here I was, a young female person under 40 years old, the President of the largest chain of May Company but it wasn't all it was cracked up to be. There was lots of responsibility. That didn't bother me but I was actually farther and farther away from the customer and that connection that I was really good at. I decided that I wanted to do something different. I didn't know exactly what it was but that red pencil was still in my box and I knew that I had an entrepreneurial spirit. I was always willing to look outside the lines and do something a little bit different. Stanley encouraged that; Dave encouraged it. So when that time came, in 1996 and I said, you know what? It's time for me to do something different. I moved back to St. Louis. I was living in Topeka, Kansas because that's where the Payless headquarters were and I immersed myself with my friend's children. I always had adult friends when I was a little girl. My mother's friends

befriended me and were good role models for me and I was the same for my friend's children and I immersed myself with them and one day we were out, Katie, who was 10 years old at the time, and my next-door neighbor and her brother, Jack, I picked them up from school and we were out looking for Beanie Babies when those were really popular. We went into the store that was supposed to have them. It said on the sign they had them in our neighborhood but they didn't and Katie made this very bold statement. She said, "You know? We could make these." Well, she meant go home and do a craft project and I was investigating a lot of business ideas. I had just finished my job at the May Company and was kind of getting in the groove of what was next. I was 48 years old and when she said that, the light bulb went off. I said, "That's a great idea," and we went home and she went downstairs to get the stuff out of the craft room and I went to the computer to look up and see if I could find any businesses in the United States that were in the stuffed animal business that I could actually buy because, in talking to a lot of venture capital people, people who would have the money to help me grow my business, they all wanted you to own something. It was risky to invest in a woman but it was risky to invest in retail at that point, even then, in 1997, because the internet was just coming on and everybody was looking at the internet as the next big thing, which, of course, it was, but it wasn't going to fully replace shopping in stores and malls. So I went and investigated buying another company, couldn't convince anybody to sell me their business and when I told this to Katie, she said, "Well..."...she never thought we were going to buy anything anyway. She said, "Well, why don't we do it?" and I thought to myself...she was already engaged. We had already kind of decided what animals we were going to have, what their names were going to be and I said, "You know what? You're right. We can do it" and six months later, we opened our first store in the St. Louis Galleria so Katie, today, is 27 years old and finishing her Master's Degree at Wharton School of Business but she has always been a really strong influence on me, just like anyone who's come in my path. So I trust her fashion judgment and her instincts. The 10-year-old girls today are slightly different than she was when she was 10. They have a lot more technology at their fingertips but still a lot of the same basic roots are there. When Build-A-Bear opened, our average of our customer was a 10-year-old girl and today it's still a 10-year-old girl.

Blanche Touhill: How did you get the idea of putting the...

Maxine Clark: So, again, listening was...I sometimes talk a lot but I do listen and I hear between the edges, so to speak, so one of my friends had a barbeque for the 4th of July. I had already designed the line. I had already decided that the things that I liked that I had been exposed to in business, like, I loved Happy Meals. I love MacDonald's, I loved Happy...I thought it was a brilliant idea, marketing idea. So our box that we put the bears in came from the concept of the Happy Meal, the container that the Happy Meal comes in but when I was at my friend's house for this barbeque, I brought some of the bears so all my friends could see and my friend, Sarah Russell who was an artist and a professor at Washington University, she looked at the bears and she said, "Maxine, these need a heart. They are so much like you. Why don't we make them hearts," and she used to do the inside linings of envelopes of antique envelopes and make art out of it, fold it, almost like origami kind of art and she made me a few little paper hearts but I knew I couldn't put paper in there. That would just be destroyed so we went out and we got some fabric and we made some fabric hearts and we called our factory over in China and said, "Could you make us hearts" and we brought hearts in but we had no idea how big that was going to be really because people started putting in 10 hearts, like, if there was a party, a little birthday party, 10 of the friends would put a heart in their friend's bear and they would all start exchanging. We ran out of hearts, like, about the second or third week we were open and I had to around to fabric stores and get hearts. We realized we were on to something here but it wasn't necessarily something that I had strategized from Minute One. It came from Sarah and when Sarah passed away a few years later, I realized that she would always be alive in all these bears because they all had her heart idea in them. So every time I see a child putting in a heart, I think of Sarah, a dear friend and very inspirational.

Blanche Touhill: Then you took this product all over the world.

Maxine Clark: Right, children everywhere...so we all have more in common than we have not in common and children love...a hug is understood in any language. That is the universal symbol for "I like you", "I care about you," and so a teddy bear signifies hug and children, especially in Asian countries and Germany...in European countries, they love stuffed animals. It's been a part of the culture for over 100 years and so that was not hard to do. Getting people to come to a store and have a birthday party was kind of hard. Sometimes people wouldn't want to do that, even

though birthday parties are a relatively small part of our business, and dressing them in the clothes was a little bit different because people wanted different...some of them wanted different clothes. Some of them wanted the things that we sold here, like, cheerleader was really popular all over the world but the only place it has cheerleaders is America. So, interesting, the influence of American culture. Pink, girls like pink everywhere. It's the universal little girl color. They like princesses and boys like super heroes but usually the same animals that were popular here in the United States were popular in a foreign country and that led me to believe that, if we left the world up to children, and again, back in my upbringing, children don't have all those disagreements with each other. They come from the adults that surround them and if they would be hugging each other much more and solving the world's problems, and I also felt that if you saw a child who was being abusive to a stuffed animal, that would be a child to worry about because children see in a stuff animal an animal and you see them being kind to a stuff animal, they're probably going to be kind of children and there's a certain connection, a security, a friendship, love, a softness that all children should have in their life and that's our goal, was really to put a teddy bear in the hands of all children.

Blanche Touhill: Talk a little bit about what you're doing since you have retired...not retired but changed your...

Maxine Clark: Changed gears is what I say because last year in October...or two years ago, in 2012, I was teaching after school program in Jennings School District and a little girl stood up to ask me a question. Her name was Tia and she was six years old and she said, "Miss Maxine, do you believe that all children's dreams come true?" and of course my heart dropped and I do; I mean, I'm living proof of that and I said, "Yes, Tia, I do. What's your dream?" and she said, "My dream is to find the sun, s-u-n," and I thought, wow, that's a big question. Is that a future Bill Gates? And all the children are laughing at her and I can tell she was like me in the 3rd grade. She asked a lot of provocative questions that people couldn't answer and I said, "Well, Tia, that's a wonderful dream" and I said, "The first way you get to know something or find it is by knowledge. So we could go to the library right after class and we could look up the sun and start to be more familiar with it and, actually, I could introduce you to a friend of mine who's a weather person and they talk about the sun and they understand

the planets and the atmosphere in a very interesting way. You could even become a mountain climber and climb up high to get closer to the sun” and by the time I was done answering her question, which was probably...I took it more seriously than she may have, all the children had stopped laughing and they started to ask me questions about science, which I wasn’t really equipped to answer. I thought I was going to be answering questions about teddy bears but I realized that acknowledgement was really an important factor there, that by acknowledging her question...and I was very sincere. It wasn’t like an act. I loved her question...that the other children could think about science and think about some of the things that little kids think about and if we could use that technique and how could we do that? How could we use our cultural wherewithal that we have, things we do in a retail store and turn a hall of learning, a school which is a halls of learning into maybe a mall of learning where teachers could become even more competitive in the way they think about their lessons, and even if that’s not your teacher but you want to learn what they’re teaching, you could go into their classroom and classrooms could be more open. I’ve been to schools in St. Louis where there are open classrooms. I was in a wonderful school in Clayton Public School where they have open classrooms and a lot of the teachers interact with each other and the kids share books and computers and all kinds of things and that’s much more like the real world in a business environment where there’s all these cubbies and you’re all in an open space and you work together as a team. So I thought that I could make a real difference in this and I decided then...that was October of 2012...that it was time for me to pass the reins to somebody else and apply the knowledge I had in retailing for all these years to making education more customer-friendly, especially in the urban environment, bringing knowledge to parents and their children as well, but the parent’s very important. If they knew that this course might exist for their child to study pharmacy at the St. Louis College of Pharmacy in the summer as a high school student in the best program, best science program, maybe they would put them in there. But they aren’t the ones that get to fill the classes up first. They’re the last to find out and by the time they find out, if they even find out, the classes are already filled with children from the county. So, I thought there was just a lot of opportunity in this area and that’s really what I’m out for, is to use my entrepreneurial knowledge of how to help teachers and schools to think

about themselves in a different way and be there for them as a coach too because I think it's easy to espouse this philosophy or another but who's going to help them implement it. So I'm glad to be there to help in any way that I can and also to use that same technique to help and teach young female and minority entrepreneurs because what the community really needs in some of these areas where there's lots of desolation, is commerce and how can we create commerce in some of these places that's really needed in the community. So we have to spur on entrepreneurs and women, moms, particularly moms often have some of the best ideas in the world. They just don't know how to take it to fruition and I do. So how can I attract some of these great ideas in young women and middle-aged women, it doesn't really matter.

Blanche Touhill: How many schools have you been involved in sort of starting up?

Maxine Clark: Well, only one school starting up that's already open is our Kip School, charter school in South St. Louis. The second school opened this year and it's in North St. Louis, just off of Delmar and Goodfellow but we plan to have seven schools so each one of them is a...

Blanche Touhill: In the City of St. Louis or the Metropolitan Area?

Maxine Clark: City of St. Louis because there are charter schools and at the moment, charter schools can only operate in the City of St. Louis. That may change with all the changes in education that are about to unfold and also to bring kind of creative programs that exist in other cities that I travel to on business that might be helpful in St. Louis, and also to encourage the better education of teachers and a real relevant education for teachers so that really smart people want to be teachers and they want to be teachers to urban children and how can we help them do that, by making the occupation of being a teacher...because teachers are my heroes. I wouldn't be where I am if it wasn't for my teachers. All those stories are true stories and, gosh, I hate to even think about what if I didn't have Mrs. Adams or Mr. (Bosves?) or Mrs. Grace, where would I be? So I think that's really what my legacy will be, is in trying to connect the dots, lots of very passionate people with very strong ideas but we've got knit it together and one of the things you do in this education world, you turn over the rock and there's 6,000 spiders underneath and how do we get them all kind of moving down the same path and building that web of togetherness that connects, than one that is cut in half and most of all,

doesn't favor children; it favors the adults in the system and I believe that all these children are our children of our community and they deserve a great education.

Blanche Touhill: Let me change the subject a little bit: If you had been born 50 years earlier, how would your life be different?

Maxine Clark: Well, I think my life would have been similar to my mother's probably. I would not have had a college education because women didn't have a college education. It wasn't common. I would have probably gone into whatever...or if I did go to college, I might have gone into the traditional fields of women: of nursing or teaching or secretarial work or social work. I can't imagine. I never thought about it. That's a great question but I think I would definitely probably not have gone to college. My parents might have been born in Europe because my grandparents were in Europe and they didn't know each other until they met on the boat coming to this country so I'm not sure exactly, but assuming that they might have known each other, I would probably have been raised in Europe and come to this country on a boat and maybe not made it to this country because I might have been caught up in the Holocaust as some of my relatives were. So it would have been a different life.

Blanche Touhill: How did you get into the International Women's Forum? How do you like the International Women's Forum?

Maxine Clark: I really wish I had much more time to spend with it because I'm in the committee of 200 and I spend with a lot of women on college campuses where I speak and so I find that what I like about it is the ability to network, the ability to resource, to find out, how are you doing this in your company; how can we do it in our company. I didn't need it so much, especially internationally, to know people all over the world because I really already had a lot of those connections but when you meet somebody and there's that connection immediately, when you both know that you're a member of something like...so you met at a conference so for me those connections are really important and they knit women together differently than they might knit men together and I guess it's our modern day version of the quilting bee, sitting out there and all telling our stories but we can sit and have dinner and talk about business and insurance and all kinds of different politics and walk away and have this very warm feeling, as if we were sitting around knitting a

story together and we'll share our stories with each other and I don't know that when my husband sits and has a business meeting with or goes to an association meeting, they sit there and talk about their childhood or their...you know, they constantly come into the storytelling and it's a really important part and it's a part of connecting and I think we're willing to be a little more vulnerable, especially when we're all together.

Sometimes when we're in a group of men and women, we're not always so easy to get along with. We might have a different front on but when we're together as a group of women, I find it incredibly invigorating and I always feel better for it. I wish I had more time.

Blanche Touhill: In closing, why don't you talk about something that you want to talk about that we haven't mentioned.

Maxine Clark: These two stories are kind of connected. When I was a little girl, I was taught in our family about charity. In fact, my grandpa was very big on this and he would ask me if I had any money, any coins and if I had a dime or a quarter, he would turn it into nickels, so two nickels or five nickels and he would always say if you have two nickels to run together, you can keep one and you can give one away. So we learned about charity at a young age and he would say things...he spoke in broken English but he would say basically, "When you have something to give away to others, to help others, you're rich and I'm a very rich man," and yet, in most people's standards, he would not have been a rich man...and fast forward my life to, as an adult, working in the community of St. Louis, when I came to St. Louis, Stanley Goodman was an incredibly involved and engaged man in the community of St. Louis, as was David Farrell and they set an example at our company that was very much like that and when I started Build-A-Bear, I wanted Build-A-Bear to be like the May Company was. I wasn't sure that we would have our name on buildings or classrooms. We weren't as big as the May Company but that was our civic responsibility, to give back to the community, and again, like my grandpa said, you're rich so you look like a much more successful company than you might be when you're getting out and engaging in the community's work. In 2004, I had the good fortune to be on the Oprah Show. She invited us and there were a couple lessons there: one was, when she first called me, I was on a business trip to Japan. Her office had called and they wanted me to be back on a Monday and I couldn't get there because I was in Japan. Then she said a Tuesday. I said, "No, I'm

sorry,” and the third phone call came from Oprah herself and she framed the question different. She said, “What would we have to do to get you to be on our show? We’re doing a show about entrepreneurs. I really want you there,” and I said, “Well, if you did it on Wednesday or Thursday, I could be there,” and she says, “Perfect, that will give us time to recreate a Build-A-Store on our set,” and that like a huge wow for our business but it also showed her generosity of spirit. She’s Oprah and I said no to her but she really wanted us there and later, the next year, after we were on that show...it was one of the best shows; they ran it many, many times. It was a totally engaged audience of women in our product...she invited me to go with her to recreate a Build-A-Bear store in South Africa and to see her work that she did in the community there. We had sort of a bond over that and it was an amazing experience, to go to a country like Africa and to see that, in one day, we could rebuild our store and that young people could come to our store and they got it right away. Nobody had to really tell them what to do. They loved it. It was intuitive. Hugging a stuffed animal, even though most of them never had a stuffed animal, and the people that worked in our store, the volunteers, had never had a stuffed animal either but they took to the idea; they took to me; they took to Oprah loving the idea, and all we had to do was show it to them once. They were writing songs. They were so generous of spirit that I think in that week that we were there, they felt rich and I felt much richer, for having had them in my life and a few years later we did actually...Oprah said, “You should open a store here. Don’t underestimate the South African people and the population and what they’ll spend their money on,” and we opened up a store. We have a successful group of stores in South Africa and some of the volunteers that worked in that store that week came to us as full-time employees. So, really, what my mother used to say, “what goes around comes around” and Oprah has a saying that I really believe in. She says, “It’s not how much you have; it’s how much you have to give” and I think that we all are given a lot of gifts and how much is up to us. The more you give away, the more you have and that’s my grandpa talking to me and that’s my story and I think the influences have been average but humongous in their impact on me. I’m lucky to have worked for a company that sort of took my family values and didn’t take them from me but had them themselves and lived up to being good citizens and taught me all through my life that theme, forward.

Maxine Clark 2-06-2014

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much.

Maxine Clark: It was fun. This was fun, could talk about it forever.