

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

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**BETSY COHEN INTERVIEWED BY BLANCHE TOUHILL**

Blanche Touhill: Would you introduce yourself?

Betsy Cohen: I'm Betsy Heather Cohen.

Blanche Touhill: Tell me something about your early life: your parents or your siblings or where you went to elementary school or high school. Was there a teacher that inspired you or what is it that sort of is the background of what makes Betsy.

Betsy Cohen: Well, I grew up and we moved around a lot for my dad's career so I had a lot of different elementary school experiences growing up but what was very important is that my dad died when I was 10 and so my mom moved us back to St. Louis where my parents had been from for many generations. So, really, we had a different situation where my mom was a single mom with three kids and had to really make our family work.

Blanche Touhill: Did she go to work?

Betsy Cohen: She did.

Blanche Touhill: What did she do?

Betsy Cohen: She worked part-time for the May Company and for several other organizations. At the same time she went and got her Master's Degree at that time. So she was a working woman from the beginning but I saw that adversity can happen and that you need to be prepared as a woman to take care of your family.

Blanche Touhill: Were you the older?

Betsy Cohen: I'm the oldest, oldest with two younger brothers.

Blanche Touhill: So, you had to do a lot around the house, I'm sure.

- Betsy Cohen: We all did. We all worked hard and my mom was a really wonderful parent and still is but the three of us as kids, we all had to step it up.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you stick together? Were you a cohesive group as a result of this?
- Betsy Cohen: Somewhat cohesive. We've always been close and we've always been somewhat protective of our mom but she worked hard and we saw that, that she worked hard and we had to work hard as well to succeed and to move forward, with her encouragement. It was a lot to handle as a single mom. She was 35 and we were three of us under 10.
- Blanche Touhill: What did she do when she got the Master's Degree?
- Betsy Cohen: She was involved in marketing, worked for several organizations in town and did various marketing and communications programs and, in the community, she also had cofounded a program for women going through widowhood and she was one of the co-founders of a program here to help other widows.
- Blanche Touhill: Was that probably one of the first that you knew about? I've never heard of a program that sort of took care of widows.
- Betsy Cohen: Yes, it's called Women/Wife/Widow and it's ecumenical and it still goes on, with help from various social workers and widows, to help others go through that stage of how to become more independent.
- Blanche Touhill: What kind of activities did they have?
- Betsy Cohen: Support, discussions, learning about how to manage a family, manage finances, take care of yourself, have a life.
- Blanche Touhill: Who runs that today?
- Betsy Cohen: I think the National Council of Jewish Women sponsors it ecumenically and so it really provides an amazing transition for women that are kind of in a transition stage of their lives and need to talk to other women who have moved through those stages and need to be self-sufficient when maybe they haven't in the past.
- Blanche Touhill: How was your elementary and secondary school experience?
- Betsy Cohen: Very focused. I was involved in academics, leadership, music and was always a very good student.

Blanche Touhill: What kind of music?

Betsy Cohen: I played cello and I taught guitar and I was on the speech team doing extemporaneous speaking, competed and always really enjoyed my academics.

Blanche Touhill: Did your team win?

Betsy Cohen: Sometimes, not always.

Blanche Touhill: What did you learn out of the speech debate activity?

Betsy Cohen: I learned how to frame ideas, how to be persuasive, how to be to the point, skills that have really held me in good stead all the way through my business career.

Blanche Touhill: I know that your career has been in business and that now you've sort of taken a slightly different turn...

Betsy Cohen: Yes, different kind of leadership.

Blanche Touhill: What about your brothers? What kind of a career did they have?

Betsy Cohen: They both...like I did...they both got MBAs and have been in the business world. My mother was in the business world; my father was an executive for Sears. We had a very business-oriented family, a lot of entrepreneurship and business orientation in our family.

Blanche Touhill: Tell me then about college, where did you go to college?

Betsy Cohen: Went to Wellesley College in Boston, which is actually where my mother had gone as well and I went there...it was really the year that all of the men's colleges went co-ed and I never thought I would go to a women's college. So I went and looked at all the men's schools and I looked at some of the co-ed schools and I actually hadn't even thought that I would apply to Wellesley College but I saw it on a beautiful May day and walked onto this amazing campus and asked...I was wearing blue jeans, I was not prepared for an interview but I was kind of overtaken by the beauty of the campus and the proximity to Boston and I went to the admissions office and said, "Could you fit me in for an interview?" and they did and I ultimately ended up applying, early decision and was accepted, early decision. It was an amazing place for me to go because, not only did I take classes at Wellesley College, but I took classes at MIT in the cross-

registration program and I did internships in Boston while I was there and really used my Boston experience and my Wellesley experience to the max.

Blanche Touhill: Were you there at the time that Mrs. Clinton was there?

Betsy Cohen: She was six years ahead of me.

Blanche Touhill: Was it a place of ideas and the women's movement?

Betsy Cohen: It was, and I think it was really a place...and it continues to be...where the orientation is that women can be what they want to be and that when you're there, the faculty is about 50/50, I don't know exactly, but it's always had women in the leadership roles, running all the different organizations, the student clubs, the opportunities for internships. They encouraged me to be an economics major. I came in thinking I would be maybe a French major or an English major and I had a visit to the New York Stock Exchange and came back and changed everything and became an economics and political science major. I saw ahead of me that there were some of the women that had graduated from Wellesley that had just started to go to Harvard Business School and I heard one of them speak on campus and I thought, I could do that.

Blanche Touhill: How did you get to the New York Stock Exchange? Was it just...

Betsy Cohen: It was a visit. It was a visit to the New York Stock Exchange during January of my freshman year during the January term. I had an opportunity to visit it and it was so exciting. I thought, I need to go back and learn more about economics and I went back and switched out of classes and then became an economics major. That was really my focus.

Blanche Touhill: Did you make friends there?

Betsy Cohen: Wonderful friends, wonderful friends, and I think that that's...actually, we get together every year. In the last couple of years, since our children are now grown, we all get together every year to get together at someone's house and have a great weekend and catch up. We talk a lot.

Blanche Touhill: During the year?

Betsy Cohen: During the year. We've always been a support network. There are seven of us that have stayed very close but I think that that support network,

it's encouragement and then the doors that Wellesley opened and have continued to open. Wellesley did something unusual. It had something called the Business Leadership Council and it was not the Board of Trustees but it was women who are business leaders all over the world, could be invited to join a Business Leadership Council and that has been a very formative part of my business career. The women that were in that group continue to be my mentors, my friends. Many of them were ahead of me in their careers and they have helped really guide me in many of my decisions.

Blanche Touhill: Do they meet at Wellesley?

Betsy Cohen: Yes, meet at Wellesley for three days, every November and then there's a social meeting during another part of the year that's just off campus somewhere fun so you have that chance to have a social fun time but we always meet on campus in November and there's opportunities to meet with students, with faculty; there's a theme; there's usually faculty presentations; members of the group who are experts present to us, to each other, and then student leaders on campus, particularly those interested in business and economics, or the topic could be digital technology, come and meet with us as well and then they form relationships with us and, in turn, we help them get careers and internships and opportunities.

Blanche Touhill: What kind of internships did you have?

Betsy Cohen: I had fabulous internships. I was an intern at the Legal Aid Society in Boston, I was an intern at Merrill Lynch and I was an intern at the SEC in Boston, all three of those while I was in college.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about what you learned in each of those because I think those are fascinating places as a student.

Betsy Cohen: They were and I think being in Boston opened up doors and Wellesley really pushed to get women who really had not had careers and doors open in some of the economic and business-oriented fields. They pushed open those doors to get us internships and that made a big difference because I thought at that point then that I might combine law and business in my career and I ultimately applied to both law and business for joint law/business programs, ultimately choosing to go for two years to Harvard Business School and not doing a joint law/business degree,

decided that the business side was what I would focus on first. But the internships were very influential.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I would think, just to be an intern at the SEC would be very broadening because you're looking at business in a different light.

Betsy Cohen: Yes, and it was an intersection of the legal and the stock exchange experience that started percolating in my thinking about how the legal side and the business side and the stock exchange that I had been introduced to, how could I take that further, which really pushed me into thinking about a business career and between years of my first and second year at Harvard Business School, I then went to Goldman-Sachs and was an intern at Goldman-Sachs, between those two years.

Blanche Touhill: So that gives you the other side of the coin.

Betsy Cohen: Yes, working for industry itself.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Did you make friends in those offices as you went through the internships?

Betsy Cohen: No, not particularly. They were really just more going in, doing a project, doing work and then taking that back with me for my life skills.

Blanche Touhill: Is this group of seven that you're still friendly with today, was it a larger number at one time or was it always the seven?

Betsy Cohen: No, it's the same group, yes.

Blanche Touhill: Were they all in business?

Betsy Cohen: No, we all were in different fields, all in different fields.

Blanche Touhill: You just met in...

Betsy Cohen: Roommates, we were roommates on the same hallway and just formed really strong friendships and we've stayed friends all those years and it's been very powerful.

Blanche Touhill: When you went off to Wellesley, was there anybody from St. Louis who went with you from your class?

- Betsy Cohen: There was another woman or two from St. Louis who went...not that I knew and not that I actually had any special friendships with but there were several who went from that area here, there were.
- Blanche Touhill: How many students were at Wellesley...
- Betsy Cohen: About 500 a year.
- Blanche Touhill: Does it have graduate programs?
- Betsy Cohen: No.
- Blanche Touhill: So it's an undergraduate...
- Betsy Cohen: Yes, all women's education and it has stayed women's and certainly the strength of Hillary Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and what they have continued to bring to the campus, there's now an Albright Institute that I got to be a participant in last year. Their strength and many other of the graduates of Wellesley all over the world and the network of Wellesley alums is extremely powerful and it was featured in the New York Times about the power of the Wellesley connection. The connections, the doors, the relationships are very strong.
- Blanche Touhill: So you never regretted it?
- Betsy Cohen: No, no.
- Blanche Touhill: In your mother's era at Wellesley, was it the same or was it a stepped up...because I just think that when I would read about Hillary Clinton at Wellesley and they would talk about the women's movement that was going on and the vitality of the academic program, the focus on saying to women, "You can be anything that you want." What about your mother's day?
- Betsy Cohen: In the '50s it was different. I think that the women knew that they could have certain careers but many were not open to them and that the idea that you would be a good mother and a wife and maybe have roles in the community and maybe do some work but it might not be what would be the most fulfilling in your life and so women like my mother, and actually, my mother-in-law with my husband, who are very motivated, ambitious women, really had jobs but never were able to fulfill all that talent and ambition they had and I think in many ways for me, that I have fulfilled

some of my mother and my mothers-in-laws' talent and ambition as well as my father's career that were cut short, all three of them, that I was able to take my business career and do things that all three of them were never able to do.

Blanche Touhill: So the glass ceiling was alive and well in your mother and mother-in-law's time?

Betsy Cohen: Yes, and it was alive in my time. I feel like I pushed it up as I went because it was definitely, when I came into the corporate world, the ceiling was right above my head and it was definitely something that I felt pushing up all the time. Every promotion I got, the ceiling got pushed up, with several of us who got promoted but it was just right above our head the whole way.

Blanche Touhill: Let me go back to the Business Leadership Council.

Betsy Cohen: Yeah, Business Leadership Council.

Blanche Touhill: Do you get selected for that or when they have it, you just choose to come back? It's open to all alums?

Betsy Cohen: No, you have to be invited and so there is a selection process of women who have been very noteworthy, somewhat like the International Women's Forum. You really have to be identified and it's somewhat delicate because you have to be identified and be viewed and evaluated as really having an impact in your realm and be invited to be part of it in addition to regular alumni networks that the college has. So, there's the regular alumni network and then this is kind of a special group that you're invited to be in, as well as many of us also help with other activities on the benefit of the college.

Blanche Touhill: And do you stay in the dormitories?

Betsy Cohen: No, we stay usually at one of the hotels nearby.

Blanche Touhill: How many attend?

Betsy Cohen: Sixty or seventy every year. The membership is about one hundred and fifty that are global and now we have our own Facebook groups and so we're in touch all the time, both for keeping in touch with people's personal, job, careers, as people are going through career transitions,

keeping up, advice, network, contacts, openings and, for example, things like board positions as many of the members are on public boards or university boards and others of us have often wanted to do that. This has been very much of a learning and a contributing to us in our continued career development together as well as we do a lot for the college and in our own home towns, we help our alumni network. So it has many dimensions of ways that we help the college and we help each other and have friendships that are very deep.

Blanche Touhill: When you travel, do you ever call these people?

Betsy Cohen: All the time. I was traveling to Philadelphia for a conference on International Economic Development last week and one of them is a CFO of a company and I just sent her a message and she made time, picked me up and we had an amazing dinner, even though we hadn't caught up for a while and it's just like immediacy when we just catch right back up about business and politics and careers and family and what's going on in the world. So it's just very deep.

Blanche Touhill: So, you graduated from college. Did you go immediately to...

Betsy Cohen: I went immediately to Harvard Business School which was unusual then and it's still unusual, to go right in, but I had such good internships that I think that's why they took me and also, they were really just beginning to take a few more women. There had been women at Harvard Business School before. We were the 13<sup>th</sup> year of women who were in the class and before that, there had been, like, a separate program at Radcliffe and the women would come over but I was the 13<sup>th</sup> year. We were 15% of each of our sections of 90. There were, like, eight sections of 90 and so we were 15% of the class that came, and there were more women from Wellesley than from any other place in that group.

Blanche Touhill: How was that experience?

Betsy Cohen: It was very, very tough. I was young. I hadn't had full-time work experience and most everyone had but I think I didn't even know how tough it was but the pressure, every day, for class, for the cases, the work, was very much relentless and it's definitely...again, it was a man's world. The internships, the opportunities, the interviewing, it was very challenging for the women because most of us were interviewing in

companies and for opportunities that really had no women in those jobs and had very few women that were in any of the professional roles.

Blanche Touhill: How did the faculty react?

Betsy Cohen: Faculty were mixed. I mean, they were accepting. Some of them were welcoming; some of them accepted but weren't really sure why we were there still and were not always the most encouraging. I think Harvard Business School is going through a lot of activities right now to assess and to try to continue to understand why it is that women's voices often are not heard and when women say something and then a man might say it later and gets the credit for that, and so in the last two years, they've been having scribes in the classrooms. They've been really looking at how are women's voices and men's voices heard differently and if half your grade is on class participation...there was a period where, again, the women were never viewed at the top of the class but we think a lot of the time we weren't heard. So there's been a lot of learning about how do women get heard and I think I didn't know differently but I don't think I knew to speak up as much; I don't think I knew what to ask for; I wanted to get through it but I think I didn't know how to excel and I don't think anyone was there looking to help the women excel and the men who knew what the game was and knew about the jobs and knew about the networking and knew that they had connections on Wall Street, they were already way ahead about what being at Harvard Business School would mean, and for the women, we were just excited to be there and how would we then take our careers to the next step and get a good job and have a career that no one ahead of us had really had.

Blanche Touhill: I think that's really well said because I've been in audiences, just what you're talking about with women who say it and then 15 minutes later, a man will say it but in a different way and then they have the dialogue with a faculty member over the thought.

Betsy Cohen: Yes, and women sometimes say things in a more tentative way or they say it in a more open-ended way and they maybe aren't as definitive about what they're putting out on the table and so they're offering it more for a dialogue whereas some of the men that are more competitive and more forceful and maybe had more experience as well, come in there and kind of nail it and get the credit and they're viewed as really bolder and kind of more leader-like in that definition and the women are

doing what they believe is right but never have been told that you have to maybe be bolder in some of those things. You have to learn to be bolder.

Blanche Touhill: So then you graduated with your MBA.

Betsy Cohen: I did.

Blanche Touhill: What happened?

Betsy Cohen: I was interviewing for different companies. I considered going back to Wall Street but I had met someone in college that became my husband and he was in medical school in Baltimore at Johns Hopkins and the decision was either, if we were going to get married, I would move to Baltimore and take my career there or I was maybe going to go to New York and we decided, and he asked me to marry him and so I then started beating the bushes to find a job in Baltimore because companies were coming to Harvard Business School but really no one from Baltimore was coming. I then leveraged all the Harvard Business School connections that were fabulous and all those Harvard Business School graduates, there were probably a dozen of them in the companies there, they opened the doors; they had me in for interviews; several of them made me offers and I joined Black and Decker in the Power Tool industry in Baltimore and that was, again, all through Harvard Business School connections.

Blanche Touhill: Then he would be there another four years?

Betsy Cohen: Two years, he was in the middle. So he had two more years to finish and then we were looking at, where would we go, with his medical degree and my business interests. Would we stay in Baltimore or would we look at other regions. So he applied for training programs in different cities that we both thought would be good, for business and cities that we both had family. So there were five or six good medical...he was interested in ophthalmology and I was interested in business. He applied and I started looking at companies and, even though I was from St. Louis and never thought I would come back to St. Louis, ophthalmology is phenomenal here and he was wooed by ophthalmology to come and at that point, Ralston Purina made me an offer and moved us here and I started a career at Ralston Purina which became Nestle Purina and he began his internship and residency in ophthalmology and built his medical career here.

Blanche Touhill: How was Black and Decker? Were you one of the first women at Black and Decker?

Betsy Cohen: Yes, to be in a power tool company as a woman was different but I, again, learned about a lot of the products and it was a marketing-oriented position and they had great products and many of the tools are bought by women as gifts. So that element of understanding the women dynamics and the men dynamics was something that I could do. I was involved in the marketing and the strategies for the two years that I was there.

Blanche Touhill: Well, that was exciting?

Betsy Cohen: Very exciting...launched some new products; the Work Mate, the work benches was really new and exciting and it was very interesting from a strategy point of view because Black and Decker had thought...at that point they were in the power tool business...but they ended up with this Work Mate work bench that was a bench that became ubiquitous for opening up and using as a bench and it was kind of a classic strategy question where, could you have a bench if you're a power tool company and they had kind of not done it and then, around the world, it took off and it came here. So I was on the team that was launching the Work Mate and this bench and it changed that view, that you were really the building industry and the tool industry. It wasn't only about the power tools. So I was part of that, really, strategy assessment and a new product launch and from then, I've always been involved in launches of new products. That really became my passion and my whole career has been involved in new product launches.

Blanche Touhill: How do you begin to include women into power tools and the work bench?

Betsy Cohen: Well, many women were getting tools for their apartments or they were buying them for family members as gifts. So the discussion about what was appropriate and how do you do it, I worked on electric chain saws and other...all kinds of power tools. I learned about, how do we communicate; how do we do the materials. Really, men have marketed women's products for years. Women market men's products. You really just have to learn about your target audience but you also have to convince the people internally that you understand the products.

Blanche Touhill: Do you give training to them?

Betsy Cohen: There's training. There's manuals. There were demonstrations. There was working with your retailers and having relationships. A lot of training was done through the retailers for the consumers.

Blanche Touhill: I think that's exciting. So you came to Ralston Purina before the big changes?

Betsy Cohen: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Tell me about that.

Betsy Cohen: Ralston Purina was an amazing consumer packaged goods company with great products, great brands, a leadership track for people in marketing and brand management but they really had never had women in their leadership tracks in their management in marketing which is where a lot of the senior careers had come from. So when I joined as a marketing assistant, there were one or two women above me but there was really new learning and actually, as I moved up to my first promotion, there were discussions. They weren't sure that a man could report to a woman so the woman ahead of me only had women report to her because they weren't sure if a man could report to a woman. So we got through that, where a man could report to a woman. Things like traveling with colleagues for business, that was new territory. Could women move up and manage these budgets? What would happen when any of us had children? How would we manage that and take...we all took very short maternity leaves. It was quite a challenge because we had to keep showing that we could do everything and manage the workload and the budgets and the strategies and the teams as well as somehow manage to have spouses and children and manage the home front.

Blanche Touhill: Tell me, how did you manage the home front?

Betsy Cohen: Very supportive husband and I had help. We had daycare for our first son and then when we had a second son, we had someone come in and there was a period when I was part of an acquisition team and I lived out of town for three months, that we had a daytime person and we had a woman who came in the evening because my husband didn't come home often until 8:00 or 9:00 and so we actually had two people who helped us

on the home front for several months while I was part of an acquisition team.

Blanche Touhill: Then you would call in and...

Betsy Cohen: Yes, I would call in and talk and come home on the weekends but I knew it was a short period of time and it was very important because one of my bosses who had been with me at Purina was part of this acquisition, when we bought the Beechnut Baby Food company and actually getting to work on a baby food company, they'd never had women in management there either and several of us were women and we got to be the marketing team on baby food and we had young children. That was actually somewhat exciting. There were two of us, one was named Barbara and I was named Betsy and the men would mix us up all the time and they would call us by either other's names because they'd never had women in the management team. So they couldn't figure out which was Barbara and which was Betsy. That was a learning for all of us.

Blanche Touhill: Did Barbara have children?

Betsy Cohen: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So your children were used to a professional couple as their mother and father?

Betsy Cohen: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And your husband obviously said, "If you want to work, go ahead and work"?

Betsy Cohen: Yes, he assumed that I would work. His mother had worked. He was from Maryland, the Washington D.C. area and his mother had worked as a working mother and my mother had worked and we just really always thought that that's how it would be and there really was not much debate about it, ever. We didn't really ever say, "Would I" or "Wouldn't I." It was really just assumed that my career would keep marching on, which is what it did.

Blanche Touhill: Was it hard to find help?

Betsy Cohen: No, no, it was not hard. I think we were very kind of explicit in terms of how we interviewed for people and were very clear and fair about what

we wanted in someone who would work with us and with our children and we were always very fair. We had, over the years, people who worked for us for several years and we had always said to them, "If you do need to move on, give us four weeks' notice. If our needs change, we'll give you notice" and we literally, every time when there was a transition, they let us know and we let them know and we've stayed in touch with all the people and we were always very fair. We had really good people and we really...it worked. But again, I had a very supportive mother and mother-in-law so I'm sure that when there were bumps or hiccups or kids that were sick, we just handled it and kept going whereas, I think for some of my friends who have degrees, many of them left the workforce and I think some of them had mothers and mothers-in-law who were not as supportive and when they had a bump in the road, they would just go, "I don't think we can do this" but we just never did that. We just always...it was like, "We'll get through this and we'll get help; we'll do what we need to do." I did have my mom in St. Louis and that was helpful for backup, and she still helps with things when we need something done, a repairman and she'll wait at home and help out. So that's great but with the kids, we always had good people but we always believed in them and communicated.

Blanche Touhill: Now, did your children...you had a boy and a girl?

Betsy Cohen: Two boys, both went into business.

Blanche Touhill: Both went into business?

Betsy Cohen: Yes, both are in the business world and they both love business and my husband, who's a doctor, is also very good at business. He was the kind of guy who was treasurer of his high school class and he loves finance and he loves business and we always have a lot of business discussion at home and both of our sons have business careers.

Blanche Touhill: Where did they go to school?

Betsy Cohen: They went, both, to public school and then they went to...

Blanche Touhill: They went to college?

Betsy Cohen: They went to Emery, the older one went to Emery and now continues to live in Atlanta where he's now doing his executive MBA at Emery while he

continues working in digital, social media for a pharmaceutical company and the younger son went to Miami...Ohio...University of Miami, Ohio, and he is now working for a financial management company in New York City and is thinking about whether an MBA will be in his future.

Blanche Touhill: That's fascinating that they chose the business arena. So they like numbers?

Betsy Cohen: They did. They like numbers. They like business. They're both entrepreneurial. They like the discussion and the problem solving. They're both relatively entrepreneurial. They were leaders in their high school activities and college, like I was, and like my husband was. They just seek out those opportunities and like to make things happen and create new ideas.

Blanche Touhill: So then you went to work for Ralston Purina. Were you involved in the takeover or the purchase or whatever happened there?

Betsy Cohen: When Nestle...

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Betsy Cohen: No, no, that was a total surprise for many of us that were vice presidents at that point. I was actually travelling on business and got a phone call at a conference that said, "Get on the next plane home," and when I was changing planes coming from Miami to Atlanta to St. Louis, in the airport in Atlanta, I saw the Wall Street Journal that said Nestle was buying Ralston Purina and so it said...the phone call said, "Get to the conference room by 4:00 in the afternoon" and we arrived there and our top leadership and the Nestle top leaders were there and talked about the whole plan and why they had bought such a prosperous company and how their philosophy was, they would buy companies that were jewels and keep them and keep their leadership team all around the world and then bring other parts of the business which they brought their pet food people in business from California to St. Louis to be part of a bigger pet food entity here. So, it was really about...it was an acquisition but it felt more like a merger because they wanted us to be the pet powerhouse and it was very professional and cultures were more similar and they valued what we did. So there was a continuation of the people in the leadership.

- Blanche Touhill: What was your title? You were Vice President of...
- Betsy Cohen: I was the Vice President of Marketing but I had moved into other areas Vice President of sustainability and other areas that, over the time that I had kind of migrated from some of the straight marketing and brand management to some of the broader social issues and ultimately was Vice President of sustainability areas.
- Blanche Touhill: When the merger, let's say, was made, or the acquisition, was your title the same?
- Betsy Cohen: Yes, I was the Vice President at that point and I was working on a range of our businesses that included some of our technologies and I had been involved in our veterinary business. I had a range of a portfolio but there was a lot of reorganizations that then started to happen as we put lots of businesses together and some people were part of that inner team and some of us were part of the keep doing your work. I ran a private label division. I ran many different things and we all started to put the pieces together to say, what would this new, bigger pet entity look like, and so lots of things got shuffled as that new entity got created.
- Blanche Touhill: Was that exciting?
- Betsy Cohen: It was very exciting.
- Blanche Touhill: Long hours?
- Betsy Cohen: Always have been long hours and a lot of travel but it was very exciting because Nestle, as the world's largest food company, offered many opportunities for our leadership and for many of us to then have more global opportunities to learn about global business and global competition, global brand management, global issues like global sustainability, environmental issues. So it provided opportunities for learning and career growth, even for those of us that kept our careers in St. Louis. It was a very exciting opportunity.
- Blanche Touhill: Where did you travel?
- Betsy Cohen: Oh, I traveled to Switzerland; I traveled to Canada, all over the United States with different parts of Nestle operations. Nestle has operations in different cities. Nestle Water is up in Connecticut; Nestle Food was based in California, so for many different initiatives, you'd work with colleagues

in different parts of Nestle but also many trips to Switzerland, outside Geneva.

Blanche Touhill: I assume it's a conservative company?

Betsy Cohen: I don't know if I'd say conservative. Yes, it's Swiss. It's very financially driven, very globally oriented, very prudent and conservative in the sense...but also bold leadership. When you're a leader, you can't be totally conservative. If you're a leader, you have to take risks that are reasonable and move into new fields, adopt new products, have new strategies. So you have to be bold as well and not just be conservative in the sense of risk-averse.

Blanche Touhill: As you went with the initial company and then you went with the new company, how was the attitude toward women in the new company, moving up the ladder?

Betsy Cohen: Nestle, globally, was open and had women in many areas but the challenge for a global company is that, to move up in a global company like Nestle, you have to really take moves around the world, to take new jobs and that is a challenge for two career couples and it's extra challenging, I think, for women, to move up and take a family or a husband, spouse and move around the world. It's a challenge for many men as well and so that's a challenge but I think that that's an area that makes it extra challenging for a company like Nestle, to elevate as many women as they might like and it's a challenge for the women, looking forward as careers in a global company. How do you get those experiences globally in different businesses and different countries to move up, but it's possible and there are women running parts of the world, businesses and there are women who have moved up to the very top at Nestle and...

Blanche Touhill: They have to be prepared to move?

Betsy Cohen: They do. The CFO right now is a woman. I've met her and we have mutual friends, actually through my Wellesley Business Leadership Council. We have mutual friends and when I went to Switzerland, I met with her but you really have to then be able to be very career-focused at a point in your life where you can take those moves and often, when you're making very much those professional steps, often happen when you're in your career formative years for women. That's a challenge. So, for men, it

might be that they're the main bread winner and, in those formative years and their wife, they can decide that, for the family's long-term interest, they will make those moves and for women to do it, it's very hard. A lot of women in Corporate America are the bread winner, the main bread winner and they do make those moves. We see that more and more but that's a bigger challenge when it's global. There's opportunity in the company, that Nestle has done a good job in making opportunities available and they work on it.

Blanche Touhill: What language do they use?

Betsy Cohen: English globally, but most of the executives at the top level speak five languages. You really are...they talk about diversity by flag often. It's really about global and so multiple languages are an advantage. That really is an overriding value, globalization.

Blanche Touhill: You think it's going to continue, the globalization?

Betsy Cohen: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And grow?

Betsy Cohen: Yes, and I think the younger workers understand that, really, we're all competing in a global world. We really don't compete in the St. Louis world. We compete in a global world for our talent, for products, for ideas and the communication that everyone has is really global and I think there's no going back on that.

Blanche Touhill: While you were with the new company...I know you were active in St. Louis...

Betsy Cohen: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about some of the activities that you engaged in here.

Betsy Cohen: Well, in my career, I always had one or two community commitments. To me, I really enjoy knowing about the local community and leaders in the community and what's going and what's important. So usually I would be on one board of a non-profit and then I was on the board of the United Way and I would maybe be involved in one of the universities. So I've been on various task forces and boards for parts of different universities but I wouldn't take on too much but would always have something where

I was involved in. Usually I was involved with the St. Louis Crisis Nursery that helps children when the families are in crisis for short-term, and United Way, I think, is an amazing opportunity across the community, to have a safety net that helps so many people and then our universities are just a wealth. So there's so many ways to contribute and learn through the universities. I've always been a learner and when I am with those organizations, to me, I have a chance to learn from people, from other board members, from the actions that are going on, and I think it's important to have that relationship where you learn and you contribute to your local community.

Blanche Touhill: How does the company react to that? Do they let you off or as an executive, do you more or less control your own...

Betsy Cohen: Yeah, as an executive, you have to be approved to do what you do so that there is an understanding that you're representing yourself and the company but, within normal bounds of what you do to support things in the community, that was valued.

Blanche Touhill: Do you take your dog to work or do you have a...

Betsy Cohen: I didn't most recently but people took dogs and some cats to work.

Blanche Touhill: I always heard that.

Betsy Cohen: Yes, definitely and...

Blanche Touhill: It's encouraged?

Betsy Cohen: It is encouraged and so there are little fences up and dog parks and that's part of the culture and I think, again, for good organizations, you build a culture that is part of the spirit. Now that I'm part of the World Trade Center, there's a global spirit and so we have flags outside all of our doors and working for the World Trade Center in St. Louis, there's a sense of globalization which, again, for me, having worked for a global company like Nestle, transitioning into a different career that involves, for me, now, working with Immigration and the World Trade Center in our region, is very natural because it feels very global, and again, I get to use my multiple languages and my interest in what's global and also what's local.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about that: Why did you decide to leave the company and set out on a new path?

Betsy Cohen: There were changes happening and it was a natural time for me to decide that that career chapter was over but it was time for a new chapter and so I had a lot of discussions about whether I might look into regional leadership. I had done a lot of these regional leadership connections but I had never had a full-time role where I was leading a regional initiative and I talked to people and I heard that this was going to come, that there was going to be an opportunity to help attract foreign people, to grow the population of St. Louis and that there would be this role working with immigrants and foreign born people at the universities and refugees from...literally from scientists to refugees that are coming and we have to grow the region and it would be a regional role and it was new and exciting and I've always done new launches, started new things and it tied into my regionalization and my international interests and I just told them, with all the applicants, that I was the one that was right and I really wanted to do it.

Blanche Touhill: So your office is in the World Trade Center?

Betsy Cohen: I'm in the World Trade Center.

Blanche Touhill: It used to be Clayton. Is it still in Clayton?

Betsy Cohen: We are still in Clayton. We are part of the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership which is the economic driver for our region in terms of government and business and economic development in the World Trade Center is really the import/export global arm of our economic development model and I'm part of that, which is a great place to be because it feels global and all the things we talk about have to do with cultures and people and how do we make St. Louis more global.

Blanche Touhill: Well, if you started your day, give me a day: what would you do during, say, one day?

Betsy Cohen: I might be at a meeting at the International Institute where we are doing a training for people in the community who want to learn about citizenship issues. Then I might be in the office and working on a program about, how do we introduce new people to the community who come in with a career area but they don't know how to connect with their career

area in St. Louis? What are we going to do to help make connections for those kinds of professionals? So, for example, I might have a call from someone at Monsanto because Monsanto is getting ready to open a new building and they're going to hire 600 new positions, of which many will be foreign-born people, and we're brainstorming, how do we help those people and how do we maybe help their spouses who come to town with what they may need to use their skills and connect? So, I might be on the phone with a company like Monsanto, and then I'll be working on memos. People are writing me, "Betsy, I heard you on the radio. How can I get involved?" so I might be...phone calls; I might be talking to several people. We had a planning session yesterday about, how do we do regional development and I'm thinking, what are going to be the parts that involve foreign-born people? So I'm talking to people, talking to media, doing presentations, getting ready. I usually am making one or two presentations a week so I'm preparing presentation decks and trying to figure out, how will I bring someone with me? Almost every time I'm making a presentation, I take a foreign-born person in the community who's from that community. So, for example, I just got a call this week about one of the young women charity organizations and they wanted to learn about immigration. So we're going to have a meeting at Grbic which is a Bosnian restaurant with 20 of these young women and I'm inviting a woman who I know who's Bosnian who's a professional to come and co-present with me, to talk about the Bosnian experience as well as why are we going to want more people who might be Bosnian or other nationalities to come to St. Louis. So I'm thinking about, what do we do to engage; how do I bring other people along; who do I know and how do we make that exciting. The same thing happens if I'm presenting at a business meeting. We had a meeting last week with the Chesterfield Chamber of Commerce leaders and I took one of the co-heads of our Asian American Chamber of Commerce with me. So he talked and he is of Asian background. He was born here but his parents were Asian and so he and I co-presented about why we need to make the region more globally attuned to welcoming foreign people and he talked about the Asian American Chamber of Commerce and how it could maybe partner with the Chesterfield Chamber and get more talent and make it more vibrant and, if they're going to have new commissions that are formed, how can they get more talent from the community that's diverse so that we build it better? So I'm always looking for partners. So that's what I do

in my day, figuring out projects, figuring out people, looking ahead, preparing and it's just diverse with great people.

Blanche Touhill: Are you writing about any of this?

Betsy Cohen: I'm not writing about any of it yet. Maybe I should.

Blanche Touhill: Some day.

Betsy Cohen: Some day. Maybe I should. I'm tweeting. Every day I'm on Twitter and I'm putting out blasts about where I've been. This morning actually, I started at 7:30 this morning. The United Way had a Multi-Cultural Society meeting at the History Museum. That's where I was at 7:30 and I was tweeting about that.

Blanche Touhill: Who receives your tweets?

Betsy Cohen: Hundreds of people; thousands of people that pass them on, about immigration, about our community. We have a group on LinkedIn. We are now encouraging people to become ambassadors of what's called The Mosaic Project.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, talk about that.

Betsy Cohen: Well, what happened was, we started this initiative called The Mosaic Project literally in June and so many people have started calling me and talking to our steering committee saying...there's a steering committee of 20 community leaders and they say, "How do we get involved?" So we created, called Mosaic Ambassadors where they get to do things in the community: go to international restaurants; give money to organizations that support immigration. One requirement is they have to invite a foreign-born person they know to dinner or out for coffee, to be more welcoming and I thought we would get 50 and we had 220 yesterday. So, these things happen when there's a need in the community. There was a feeling that people wanted to be part of it and so my challenge, again, with my new launch product mentality: how do I capture that desire of people? And so for me to just say to them, "Oh, I hear that you're interested. Nothing for you to do; I'll get back to you in six months," that isn't a good answer. If the community is saying, "I want to be involved. I want to be part of the St. Louis Mosaic Project," I had to create something where they could be a part of it and I just sent out a note to

these 220 this week saying, "We're going to do an orientation at the World Trade Center next month. Come and we're going to talk about the Project and what more you can do." So, I'm making it up as I go but creating a cadre of community leaders who want to be part of making us more global.

Blanche Touhill: That's why you should write. I mean, you can write about the other part of your life but this...you're really plowing new fields with your entrepreneurship.

Betsy Cohen: I think that this initiative...the steering committee that was started a year before I came into the role began the process with data and a broad steering committee with representations from five universities, the business community, the government, education, and the International Institute. They began the work but I see myself as a catalyst with them to literally change the region and we are game changers. It ties into educational attainment; it ties into entrepreneurship, of which all of our incubators in town, 39% are foreign-born. So entrepreneurs and immigration go together because people who are foreign-born are 60% more likely than our native born to start businesses.

Blanche Touhill: How do the organizations that currently have existed in St. Louis like the International Institute, how do they react to your efforts?

Betsy Cohen: Well, they're key to it. I mean, they see that this is an extension. They can do what they can do but they can't change the whole community and so, as part of this, they see that these different groups that already have expertise, they see and what I want them to know and what they know from what...we've worked together now for six months...is, they are the knowledge. They deliver services but we need messaging. We need programs. We need things that touch with tentacles further than they can do. They don't have the budget and the staff to reach out to chambers of commerce members and the general citizenship but I, with my knowledge and expertise in marketing and business career and knowledge of our community, I can take their message and take it further. I can bring potential donors to their attention. I can help change and give them a bigger platform. It's like making it all bigger, making the pie bigger as we make our community more well known and as it becomes more attractive for foreign-born people, it elevates their work in a way...they were already doing great work but they didn't necessarily

have the platform but when I go and get invitations and I bring them as the expert, I'm really the connector but they're the expert and they know it. I put them on that pedestal. That's why I take someone from the nationality or from an agency, because I'm the one that can make the whole thing work together but they have the deep knowledge. They're really the subject matter experts. They have years of experience and so they keep mentoring me and guiding me on the facts but they're really the knowledge source and I want to really elevate them.

Blanche Touhill: How do you work with universities?

Betsy Cohen: Well, five of the universities are on our steering committee: SIUE, Webster, St. Louis University, University of Missouri-St. Louis and Washington University. Deans and provosts are on the steering committee and we are looking at ways that we engage the universities and talented undergraduate, graduate, post docs, into this initiative as well. In fact, this week we just made an announcement: the Regional Business Council here has a program where every year they have 130 diverse university students that get paired with business leaders. They never had international students in that group because the international students have a hard time getting visas. So they always have 130 or 100...130, never had any international students. Because of the St. Louis Mosaic Project, because of leadership on the steering committee, because of the university people on the steering committee, we announced this week, 11 of the 136 are international students from SLU, Washington University, University of Missouri and Webster and so they were engineering and IT students through those universities and for the first time, are going to be mentored by business leaders and the idea is, maybe some of them will then be allowed to get visas through those companies and we can retain more talent. So it's this collaboration between the government, the business, the university people and we're all working together to say, "How do we retain talent?" and the universities have talent and I'm trying to, again, connect the dots to keep that talent here.

Blanche Touhill: Since 9/11, I think the universities have had some difficulty in getting students through all the processes...

Betsy Cohen: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Is that still as hard as it has been?

Betsy Cohen: Yes. I mean, it's more challenging but we do have lots of international students that come to St. Louis region. The number is...I've heard the number. I don't know, it may be 10,000 a year in all of our universities and they're here and the question is, how do we retain more of them within the guidelines of what our country can do with immigration and that's going to keep evolving and changing and, as some of those things change, we want to be prepared to accept more of the talented students, particularly of engineering and technical fields that, right now, we are training but then we are not allowed to have enough openings to keep them.

Blanche Touhill: Was it hard to leave Nestle?

Betsy Cohen: It was a chapter. It was hard because I had a lot of years there that were wonderful but, you know, chapters do end and you would then start new chapters. I really was ready for that next chapter.

Blanche Touhill: Is this more entrepreneurial than what you were doing?

Betsy Cohen: Yes, because in a big corporation, I was entrepreneurial but you have many different levels of reporting and budgets and constraints and opportunities because you are on a profit-driven mission and you're in a very big, large organization. This, being a catalyst with many people, to start a regional movement to change our goal by 2020, we have more foreign-born rate of increase than any other major metropolitan area. Well, measure that by the 2020 census versus the 2010. So I have a metric out there and we are going to have to attract, in my mind, about 10,000 foreign-born people in the next seven years. So we have metrics and we'll have milestones but it's more entrepreneurial; it's more based on all the collaboration around the community. So, for example, the idea that the Regional Business Council would work with the universities and get 11 international students, we didn't need approvals or a budget; it's influence; it's changing thinking; it was their understanding that they could be a part of this initiative if they would tweak their program instead of taking 136 that were U.S. citizens, that they could take some that were foreign and see what we could do with that. They could be a part of this regional initiative. So I'm working to get people to want to be part of our regional initiative. So it's more about persuasion. Coming back to my

early years in speaking and persuasion, it's more about influencing people to be part of a movement to change the region. So it's more entrepreneurial in that sense but it's also harder to measure.

Blanche Touhill: I always thought St. Louis was a very ethnically rich society. Are you finding that?

Betsy Cohen: Is it. I mean, we've had waves of immigration and people that really identify with their own wave of immigration. At one point it was more European and now we have literally groups from all over the world. I had the honor of speaking at a naturalization citizenship ceremony two weeks ago at the Federal Courthouse and that was so inspiring but I spoke to welcome...there were 54 new Americans that represented 29 countries and only one was from a Western European country, one. The others were from the African continent; they were from Asia; they were from Latin America; from Canada; some were refugees that came out of war-torn areas; some were professors and 29 countries for 54 people. That is huge diversity but new kinds of diversity, new waves that follow the European waves and now we have waves coming from all over the world. So we are very rich but we have to understand that and get more people to value that.

Blanche Touhill: I think that valuing foreign cultures really leads to the Arts. Are you working with the various Arts organizations that are based with ethnic communities whereas the Japanese have the restaurants and...

Betsy Cohen: I think the Arts are going to be an interesting area. I'm getting a lot of calls from different Arts groups that are working with different ethnicities and nationalities. We have Festival of Nations; there's music...I don't quite know yet how we'll partner with all of them. The Sheldon is doing the activities and the History Museum and the universities are all now thinking...they call me and they say, "Betsy, we're putting on a program that involves this group. How are we going to get..."...and I don't quite know yet how we all partner and what we do to do that. But there is a lot that involves history and a lot involves culture and foods and music and it's part of making us all more globally savvy, with cultural awareness, by partaking of the emotional senses of spirit and art and culture and food but then you also have to understand politics and we also have to then understand people's living styles and culture, but really, people need jobs, they want education and they want to live in a quality place. So, we

have needs of people coming here that are about economics; that are about education; that are about living, but, as a community, we often want to think about more the social cultural parts but, if I'm going to work from an economic development point of view, I really have to focus on jobs and education and helping people make work and living connections so that we can really provide for economic well-being that, in turn, allows the rest. So I get pulled both ways. I don't have an answer but I get those calls and I know we'll figure it out. I haven't figured it out yet.

Blanche Touhill: Talk to me about the companies. Do they want foreign workers?

Betsy Cohen: Many of our companies have a good number of foreign workers already that they do sponsor for visas, particularly those that have scientific, technology, engineering, biotech. Again, that's why a lot of our start-ups have foreign-born, for technical talent. So, in the sciences and the engineering and the IT area, those companies have a lot. In other areas, not so much but I also think, as a country, we have American and native-born people who can do many of these other jobs and there's a trade-off between what, as a country, do we need with American-trained people who have jobs versus how do we bring talent in that is going to help compliment, whether it could be a high level job, a scientist that we need, or it could be some agricultural workers where we don't have native-born workers and we really do need foreign workers to do the work. So, some of it is specific to industries or agriculture or the sciences and other is just about generally how do we have foreign people.

Blanche Touhill: So, when you try to change the metric of the foreigner coming to St. Louis, it's all socio-economic?

Betsy Cohen: It is all socio-economic. We are working...there are other regions right now that are focusing only on high skilled immigration and that has not been our strategy for a range of reasons that involve really the beliefs of the steering committee, is that we need to be welcoming to those that have high skills and also we need to be welcoming to those that have lesser skills and that are going to be in service industries, that are going to be in our hospitals, that are going to be in our restaurants, that will be working with landscaping, that are going to be nail salons. We need people. We need our city. We need people who are going to move into our neighborhoods, keep our schools open, keep our teachers hired, that

are going to keep neighborhoods vital with storefronts. So we need the vitality that some of the lesser educated people are going to bring and they're going to buy homes in neighborhoods that others have left and they're going to keep vitality in our city and some of our suburbs that are not going to be touched by people that are coming at the high level. So we need both. If we're going to grow the people in our city and keep St. Louis a vital region, we need all of those stratas and we have to help people who come and maybe already have degrees from other countries but they don't either have the certification or the English and we have to help them not have brain waste, they call it. How do we move them along so they can contribute? But really, you almost have to be, in that case, welcoming to all kinds of people and that is our philosophy.

Blanche Touhill: Let me ask you: How did you get into the International Women's Forum?

Betsy Cohen: I was invited by several members who knew me and knew what I did at Purina and the leadership that I had exhibited there and in the community and I had been invited. Several were members and I've been a member of other groups in town and I was also very committed to the Wellesley Business Leadership Council and I knew the value that that had provided to me and I thought then if there was a really high level, top level women's organization here that would give me those kinds of friendships and learning and shared knowledge regionally, that was motivating. So I got invited.

Blanche Touhill: And if you were born 50 years ago, then you probably would have gone to Wellesley?

Betsy Cohen: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: But you would have probably followed your mother's...

Betsy Cohen: I would have worked but I probably would never have gotten as high and I would have had high level community leadership roles and run a volunteer organization and taken my leadership into some...I was going to...would have expressed it but I never would have done it in the for-profit world or in the global business world but I would have expressed it, just never in the business world that I did find very fulfilling.

Blanche Touhill: One last question: When you were moving up and kept meeting the glass ceiling, did you have a secret of success, how to get around the glass ceiling and move up?

Betsy Cohen: No, I think it was just persistence. I think I believed that if I kept at what I did and kept asking, over time and kept saying, "I want to make it to the next level; what does it take?" and I would hear, "Not yet," and then I would say, "Well, what does it take?" and I really did want to keep moving up at that company because it was a really wonderful company and other offers would tempt me but I really felt that it was the best opportunity in St. Louis to grow my career and my skills. I really was very committed and I just kept saying, "What's it going to take?" and I think just persistence and each time I would feel...it didn't happen on the timing I would have liked and if I had left and gone to other companies, I could have gotten higher titles sooner but I valued that organization and it was very loyal to the people, those of us that were there. There was a lot of loyalty and they were loyal to us and we were loyal there and it just took longer but I was somewhat...probably relentless and kept trying to show the value that I could bring at each level and kept at it. I feel like, I did succeed at it and it took time but it was worth it.

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much.

Betsy Cohen: Thank you.