

Susan Elliott 6-04-2013

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SUSAN ELLIOTT INTERVIEWED BY BLANCHE TOUHILL

Blanche Touhill: It's June the 4th, 2013, and we have a wonderful guest before us today and I'd like to have her introduce herself.

Susan Elliott: Well, thank you, Blanche. It's a privilege to be here today. I'm Susan Elliott, Susan Spoehrer Elliott, which goes way back in St. Louis history and I'm a member of the International Women's Forum and that's been a very important component of my life so I'm delighted to answer whatever questions you would like to pose to me.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I'd like to know about your early life: where you were born, something about your parents, did they influence you, did you have siblings, was there a teacher in your elementary or secondary school that really inspired you or was there somebody else in your family? Tell me about your background and how that helped to form you.

Susan Elliott: Well, I was born in St. Louis and grew up here and basically this has been home all our lives. Married, and my husband's also a native St. Louisan so this is very much home for our whole family. I went to a great school that had two grades in one room, each room way back then and I guess my start in education was that, while I was sitting in the 4th grade, I was bored with that work and so I was also doing the 5th grade work and after a couple months, Mrs. Beck suggested to my parents that they move my desk across the room. So, that was a way to get a head start on my education. I went to Smith College which was an awesome experience and more about that later when I talk about my involvement in the business world. Then in 6th grade I went to what was Mary Institute then. It's now co-ed, MICDS and there was a gentleman there, the head master, Mr. Beasley, Ronald Beasley, who was a Cantabrigian as he taught us and it's so amazing to think he would be head of a girls school and he told us we could go as far and as high and as wide as we wanted to. All we had to do was put our minds to it and do it. I would have to say

that was probably the most influential person in my education world. As far as my parents were concerned, my father was a lawyer for over 50 years, graduated from Washington University Law School and the NLRB came out in 1935, National Labor Relations Act and so I guess you would say he was a form of an entrepreneur in himself because he jumped right on that and for over 50 years, he represented management and labor relations issues, built his own law practice. Mother was always very much a volunteer and, in a sense, an entrepreneur. She did found the coffee shop at Children's Hospital and was very much involved in the hospital activities and others. She was always very involved in the not-for-profit world and probably the most significant influence in my life...well, they were both very supportive but my father...when I was going to start my business, I said, "You know, let me just give you some of the facts and ideas and concepts and would you poke holes in them?" and he said, "You don't need to do that. Just do it" and that was the kind of encouragement that he gave me on many different occasions.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have siblings?

Susan Elliott: A sister, Sally (Lemkemeyer?), married to Ned Lemkemeyer and they, too, have been extremely involved. Ned was an attorney with my father and then has been very much involved in the not-for-profit world, they both have.

Blanche Touhill: Is she entrepreneurial, as you are?

Susan Elliott: Well, I would have to say yes, in a sense. She helped found the Haven of Grace but we're worlds apart in terms of not-for-profit and business but other than that, very caring and very thoughtful individual.

Blanche Touhill: I've heard you talk about when you went off to Smith College and you had not visited it before?

Susan Elliott: Oh, heavens, no. We didn't think about going and visiting schools then. You had to take the train to get there, which was over 24 hours so it never occurred to any of us.

Blanche Touhill: Well, how did you choose Smith?

- Susan Elliott: I applied to Smith and Vassar and was accepted at both and a camp counselor I had had had gone to Smith and I liked her so I thought, well, okay; if it was good for her, then that's where I'll go.
- Blanche Touhill: How was Smith? Was Smith advocating women in business or entrepreneurship or what was the atmosphere at Smith in those days?
- Susan Elliott: Well, obviously being a women's college, you were very much empowered to think that you could do anything you wanted to do and, I don't know, maybe this is a lead in to starting my business, but I went to the college counselor when I was graduating, which was 55 years ago this month, and said, "There has to be a job in this country that I do not now have to go to typing school" because women could be teachers, nurses or secretaries, and probably half the class was getting married. That was just what you thought you would do when you graduated from college but that wasn't in my list and Smith told me, "IBM is actively recruiting women and if you have the analytical logical aptitude that they'll test you for" and I had always loved math so that was a good fit and I was tested and offered the job and they had just de-centralized their training so that I could take my training in a regional training office in St. Louis because in those days you wouldn't go to New York and get an apartment and live by yourself. I mean, if you weren't getting married, you went home. So it was perfect. I could come home to St. Louis. The training started in the fall. We had classes from 8:00 to 5:00 every day, homework every night, 11 weeks. The 10th week, one week, they told us about computers and said the average person wouldn't need to know more than that because there weren't going to be that many. IBM in 1958.
- Blanche Touhill: Were there many women in the class?
- Susan Elliott: We graduated, it was a class of over 600 and...
- Blanche Touhill: What percentage were women?
- Susan Elliott: Oh, it was 100%.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, it was 100%?
- Susan Elliott: Oh, yeah, Smith was always...
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, no, I meant the IBM...

Susan Elliott: Oh, IBM, there were...I can't remember if I was the only one in the class but actually, in the IBM office at that time, there were five women and about ninety-nine men so we were...but that was fine. I never focused on the fact that I was a woman and different from them. I loved what I did and you just worked hard but I do have some funny women...the ladies' environment stories. One is, we wore white gloves to work. Some women wore hats but I never liked hats...smoking, and there was a lot of that then. The men could smoke at their desks but the ladies had to go up to the ladies' room to smoke. When we would have...

Blanche Touhill: Could you wear slacks?

Susan Elliott: Oh, no, I wouldn't have dreamed of that. I think we finally let people start to wear pants in the late '90s in our office later on. No, business suits. And we sang Every Onward IBM out of their hymnals, if you can believe it.

Blanche Touhill: In the morning?

Susan Elliott: Not every morning, no, when they would have meetings, that would be part of the routine. And when they had evening events, which they would have maybe four times a year, the men who would come with their spouses literally would not talk to me. They'd walk right past me because they didn't want their spouses to know that they worked with me.

Blanche Touhill: Those are wonderful stories.

Susan Elliott: That's the way it was, way back then.

Blanche Touhill: When did that begin to change, or had you left IBM by then?

Susan Elliott: I'm not sure, as far as IBM was concerned because, personally, the last piece of that, I was pregnant in 1966, eight years later, and their policy was that you were so fragile, you had to go home at six months and sit and wait for three months until the baby was born. Well, that was not acceptable to me. I loved what I did and Howard, my husband, was just recently out of law school so we needed me to work. The bank downtown, First National Bank, wanted to hire me but they had the same policy. So my husband, with his new law degree, incorporated me. The bank felt protected, they could hire a corporation, not a pregnant lady

and so I was able to keep working and that's how I founded my business, 1966.

Blanche Touhill: But you went to work for the bank first?

Susan Elliott: As a corporation. They hired the corporation.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, to do some project?

Susan Elliott: Yes, they were dying to get my technical expertise.

Blanche Touhill: Was that the birth of the business at the same time?

Susan Elliott: Yes. Now, literally speaking, I freelanced as opposed to being a business that was a 40-hour-a-week business because we moved multiple times with my husband's jobs, and 1970 to '73, he was a Nixon appointee so we had a special time in Washington, D.C. In 1983...so fast forward to, we were back in St. Louis and we went to an Arts & Education Council auction and they had one of the original PCs on the auction list. IBM came out with those PCs late '81, early '82 and this was March or April, I guess, of '83 and so I said to Howard driving out to the auction, "Can you imagine having a computer in your home?" and he agreed, that was just astounding. So, bless his heart, he raised his hand and we got the computer for \$4,000 and, as we were walking out, a good friend and a very recognizable name in St. Louis, Don Danforth, bid against Howard and Donny said to me, "What are you going to do with that PC?" and I said, "I'm going to revive my business." Oh, I was awake all night, I was so excited. I couldn't get enough of it. So I was back at the bank again and I had to give notice, proper notice, so I gave three weeks and then I was in my basement with a light bulb in the ceiling, washer and dryer in the back of the room, a piece of plywood as my desk and I said, okay, here I am, now what I do? No business plan, no nothing. I wouldn't even have known how to do that.

Blanche Touhill: Now, by that time you had two children?

Susan Elliott: Yes. Catherine is the oldest, she's the one that was born in 1966. Currently she's a partner with Brian Cave, and then Elisabeth, who came along three years later, is Catherine Love and then Elisabeth Nedringhouse and she's now the one that runs the business. Catherine

has three girls who are 10, 13 and 15 and then Elisabeth has two boys, just about 10 and about 13.

Blanche Touhill: So both girls followed you in a professional career with husbands and with children?

Susan Elliott: Yeah, we're very blessed.

Blanche Touhill: How did you manage all of that?

Susan Elliott: That's one of the favorite questions when I take questions, when I've done speaking engagements, work/life balance. Well, I was just laughing with my daughters the other day about this: I just assumed that they could pretty much manage their own lives so one of my favorite stories is Catherine was just 16, Elisabeth, 13, was bike balleting, fell, hurt her arm, the next morning said, "Oh, my arm really hurts," and I said, "This is perfect. Your sister just got her driver's license. She can take you to the doctor" and there they were, two-and-a-half hours later they had to re-break the arm, put a cast on it; 13 and 16, but they managed it. I mean, that's just something that came naturally and they would walk to school. We lived close enough to Mary Institute that they could walk and I remember being involved in a not-for-profit in North St. Louis one time and they were talking about latchkey kids and I said, oh, my gosh, I have latchkey kids! They let themselves in every afternoon, do their homework, watch soap operas or whatever.

Blanche Touhill: But your business was in the basement for a long time, wasn't it?

Susan Elliott: Well, no, just 1983 to '85.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about the beginning. How did you get clients? What were you offering?

Susan Elliott: I have to digress just for a moment to say that with the girls, when I was in the basement, they would laugh that they used to have to call down to the clothes shute to tell me to come up and fix some dinner. Really, networking, talking to people, communicating. There is no substitute for that human contact. One of the things that I did was found an advisory board and wonderful Ed Schnuck, founder of Schnuck's Markets, agreed to help me get some people to sit on the advisory board and he asked three, probably men, who didn't even know me who said yes, they would

serve on the advisory board because Ed asked them to do it. One was the head of AAA, he put me on the board of AAA. That kind of networking and outreach and the opportunity to meet people at the CEO level and the C-levels. Another thing...and I do recommend this to young people today...is getting on boards, not-for-profit boards initially. Personally, initially, because I was always on the finance committee, it helped me learn how to run a business in the finances without going to school to learn, but that was a fabulous opportunity to network because you'd meet other business people who were on these boards and I used to laugh that I was a token. You probably know what that's all about, and so somebody that I would be serving with was on another board and they needed a woman and then this man would say, "Oh, well, I served with her. She's okay, we can put her on this board." So I was blessed to be able to be on a number of not-for-profit boards and then both on Ameren and Angelica's, which has gone private...public boards, and the ultimate for me was to be chairman of the Federal Reserve, which ended in 2000 so it was Alan Greenspan, years of irrational exuberance and there's no question about the fact that they always tried to be very diversity-conscious and at that point, they needed a woman. So I was, I guess, the first woman president.

Blanche Touhill: What was the difference between your first business and your second? Was it basically the same?

Susan Elliott: It has always been the same. So, what evolved then...and I should have thought to continue...our longest, and probably richest heritage is in the education world and at the Ladue School District, Betty Schwarz said to me, "We're getting some IBM's..." ...as opposed to Apple's "and I want the school district to think that I've made a good business decision. Do you think you could teach some classes at night?" I kind of scratched my head and thought, "Well, yeah, I guess we can figure out how to do that." So that really got us started in the education world and Emerson Electric found out about us through that and they were the first large corporation to take a chance on us and once they did, we really got into all the large corporations in St. Louis: Monsanto, Anheuser Busch, Southwestern Bell which, of course, is now AT&T. St Louis had 11 Fortune 500 world headquarters here at that time and so we called them our Fortune 11.

Blanche Touhill: And so you provided the education for their employees? When they hired somebody, they would go through some kind of a program?

Susan Elliott: Well, no, this was more just how to use the computer and then the software on the computer, word processing, and Word Star and then Word Perfect and then Microsoft Word, and the large corporations in particular would take the training in-house after they did a massive (cover?) and then when the next new piece of software came out, they'd send all their people back to us for us to teach them how to do the next new thing and I'm fond of saying that, in the 20-20 hindsight, there's no question that the changes in technology drove our business because that's what the large corporations wanted and we had techies working for us who loved to do the next new thing. So we had no resistance to change as we would go forward. Well, I guess our biggest opportunity was in the year 2000, Monsanto was converting from CC Mail to Microsoft because CC Mail was not Y2K-compliant. We trained 35000 people around the world in three months, six classes a day, just in order to have them be ready to convert on January 1.

Blanche Touhill: Did you produce the manuals or did...

Susan Elliott: Yeah, we wrote the courseware and, yes, produced the manuals and then, once year plus later, 9/11...total CD change because no one would put their employees on airplanes to go be trained or trainers on airplanes to go train them and at that point, we were just ready with computer-based training and so we were able to start putting the training on CD and the internet didn't come until probably mid '90s and today, we do game-like multimedia interactive training that you can take on the computer and can be transmitted worldwide. We're doing a lot for the government and Elisabeth is pioneering...my daughter, who's president now...she's pioneering delivering training on smart phones, which is really awesome. So, in addition to the training, we really had two other core competencies. One is in the technical management of small and mid-sized business' hardware/software. There was a woman, Mary Berthold, who was on our advisory board for Monsanto and she called one day in about '86 and said, "We're getting some computers. Do you think you'd have anybody who could come over and take them out of the boxes and install them?" and we're thinking, "Well, I don't know, yeah, I guess we could do that." So that got our start in the technology management

services. Now we have a help desk and it's about 90% remote, that we can manage remotely but that 10% that...say your hard disk died and a real human being has to go make the change, those real human beings cannot be outsourced to India. So that still is a very viable competency today and much more volume-based in small and mid-sized business base. We did, for years, write software applications, especially when, in the early '90s, companies were beginning to trust that a PC could have a missing critical application but with the outsourcing to India, there just were no margins left and Elisabeth spun that off in 2009, I think it was.

Blanche Touhill: What's interesting, it's been a business owned by women for 30 years.

Susan Elliott: Forever, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Or forever.

Susan Elliott: Yeah, I mean, I founded it in '66 and, as I say, I made my daughter, Elisabeth, president in 2004 and she gradually assumed more and more responsibility so in 2010, then she became president and CEO and I'm chairman of the board.

Blanche Touhill: And she still has an advisory board?

Susan Elliott: She's done it a little differently because she's been in YPO and Entrepreneurs organization and has other counselors and advisors but she is doing an absolutely phenomenal job. The last couple...three years, the company's done better than it ever had been before. So she's just driving it and I couldn't be more proud of her and obviously, to have mother to daughter is...

Blanche Touhill: Did you have trouble borrowing money or signing rental agreements?

Susan Elliott: Really, no. First of all, borrowing money, I was blessed to have a husband who had a really good job. He was in a senior management position at Laclede Gas so we had an income. So I guess for that first three or four years, I didn't take a salary but, as I say, we were blessed that we could manage it that way. I remember when I was bringing in the first real employee and I was going to pay him \$75,000 and my husband was about to have a stroke because I still wasn't taking a salary but we made up for that. So, I really was blessed not to ever have to take out big loans. We didn't want to take on liabilities; didn't want to take on debt and as far as

signing rents, I think the person who was more worried about my signing the rent was my husband. My first office was, like, 1000 square feet, something like that...1200. He was worried that I would be signing the rent and nothing would happen. So I put some little IBM stock that I had from working there up as the collateral so he didn't have to worry. We never used our house as collateral. That was just a given. If I was going to do it, I had to figure out...

Blanche Touhill: And you didn't have trouble with the landlord saying, "This is a woman-owned business" or...

Susan Elliott: We really didn't ever. You know, maybe because I never focused on that as an issue and I know that when the women's issue and all of that came out, I used to think that the women who walked around wearing on their sleeves the fact that, "Oh, I'm a woman, I'm entitled to this and I should get loans and I should be given this," that, I thought, did a disservice to the rest of us who were just out there working like crazy, doing the best that we could at whatever job we were doing. So, no, I was very fortunate because I think I didn't let my brain focus on it. I was just out there to solve the business problems of our clients. So I was fortunate in that regard.

Blanche Touhill: Talk to me about working for IBM because it was a male culture, wasn't it, in those days?

Susan Elliott: Oh, yes, oh, yeah. I don't know. I mean, I just loved what I did. In fact, Howard says he had to wait a whole extra year to ask me to marry him because I was working so hard, he couldn't ever get my attention. I don't know. But anyway, I was privileged...well, let me back up a second: They didn't have computers in the local IBM office. There was one in a Quonset hut at Washington University and so I really had to teach myself how to use it and they would let me go play for a half an hour, from 6:00 to 6:30 in the morning on this computer in the Quonset hut. So, having basically taught myself how to use this 650, there was an assignment at Monsanto that I was lucky enough to be able to be assigned to and help this person write some software and that evolved into probably one of my most special opportunities and it was at Monsanto for IBM. There was a gentleman who came to St. Louis from New York, Steve Firth, I remember his name, and we were sitting in a conference room and he said, "We're going to be able to search data randomly" and it was like,

“Whoa!” because till that point, everything was sent on tapes, was serial, so if you wanted to get to Smith and the name and address list, you had to go through three-quarters of the tape to get to the S’s. So search data randomly! So what we had the opportunity to do, Monsanto had this research library and their documents that they valued at \$10,000 each or something, but the current research scientist couldn’t get back into the documents and didn’t know what was in them and reinvented the wheel many times. So the concept was to key word the document, to go through those documents and indicate what were the key words, a lot of chemical names and we put those into punch cards and then there was what we called a (tub?) file of punch cards which had one of every different word that was found. So we took...when somebody came in, you pulled the punch cards that were the key words, put them in the computer and out it would come with the document or documents that would meet that criteria. Well, you know what that is, it’s Google. It’s Google, 50 years ago. So that was a very special opportunity.

Blanche Touhill: But when you went into business, it was really to bring the computer to the rest of the society?

Susan Elliott: Yes. In 1983, when we bought the computer, most people thought it would never have any significance in the business world. It couldn’t possibly because they were all huge mainframes filling rooms, all the electronics were under the floor and chillingly cold to try to keep it...and loud and noisy. I used to come home at night because you’d screamed over all these computers all day long, and Mother would say, “Shh, I’m right here. Stop yelling.” I’d forgotten about that. So Monsanto, I had the opportunity to work in Anheuser Busch...

Blanche Touhill: In a computer product?

Susan Elliott: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Through IBM?

Susan Elliott: Through IBM, this was all my IBM days and in those days, they had beer in coolers at the water fountain and the employees could just pick up a beer whenever they wanted one. That was easy. I was also at International Shoe which was done on 12th and Washington, designed some systems for them. So I was very fortunate to have...

Blanche Touhill: So you saw the opportunity and you went in and learned how to do it?

Susan Elliott: Well, yes and no. In that case...by that time, you were getting more training from IBM but still, each was a new application and I think what I loved to do most in my 50 years in business, was to help businesses solve their business problems using the computer.

Blanche Touhill: And you were at it early on in that.

Susan Elliott: I was.

Blanche Touhill: And you must have been one of the few women.

Susan Elliott: I was, but also, the other thing, besides being one of the few women, is our services to the clients came along to the clients free, included in their mainframe leases. I mean, these are multi-million dollar leases but we would just be assigned to the clients and IBM basically told us to smother the clients with attention and make sure that you exceeded their expectations. Well, the client, that was fine because they weren't looking at how much were they paying us and how many hours were we working. We just came along with the whole program.

Blanche Touhill: And then did you transfer that into your own business, that idea?

Susan Elliott: Well, actually, yes. We used Smother and I have a document, we have signed a concept to each S-m-o-t-h-e-r and the "r" was build relationships that last forever.

Blanche Touhill: Did any of your contacts from early IBM transfer into your later business?

Susan Elliott: Yes, as a matter of fact. One of the women that I worked with, Martha Consulman, came to work for us as an instructor. She was fabulous and when we lived in our state capitol, when I was freelancing and I wanted to work at least part-time because the kids were really little, it was my IBM contacts, and one gentleman in particular who was then in the Jefferson City office and he said, "Oh, I know her," and found me a job at the Department of Education. So for the four years that I was there, I designed the systems for the Department of Education, how to manage all their certifications for the schools, elementary, secondary and then prove that they, indeed, were properly certified. So that was a very special opportunity at that time. I've just been blessed to do so many things and each one just kind of fed the next and I've been, as I say, very

fortunate and ultimately, at some point you want to talk about it, I wrote a book about it.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I do. Well, let's talk about the book. You wrote a book, Across the Divide, and you want to show us the cover and...

Susan Elliott: Okay, Across the Divide, Navigating the Digital Revolution as a Woman Entrepreneur and CEO. So it basically documents the stories that I have told, a picture with Alan Greenspan...actually, a picture with John Kennedy because he spoke at our commencement and one of my real reasons for writing this...of course, I'm pleased to document it...is what I'm...the expression, "pay forward." There's so many people who helped me along the way that if I can pay forward and help others, entrepreneurs, young people coming up in the world today, and if this would be of help to them...I have seven success criteria that I've identified: Passion: if you're passionate about what you do, nothing is in your way. Everything's an opportunity; perseverance: if you persevere, you get what you want and I've got lots of stories about that; integrity: without that, you have nothing; customer sat, is what IBM called it, customer satisfaction and smothering your clients; people: people buy from people, people communicate your culture, take it to the next level. Without the teams, you have nothing; focus: you had to be focused in expertise in what you were doing. I'm fond of saying, whenever we got on those fringes, we'd probably screw up because we weren't focused; and the last is nothing is constant as change, and that has been my mantra for 50 years, and in fact, advise to businesses today is, you have to think about changing when you're right at the peak of your success and that's the hardest time to do that. But look at IBM, they almost missed...they invented the PC and they almost missed out. Kodak invented the digital camera and had to file for bankruptcy. IBM came late to the search world but Bing doesn't hold a candle to Google. So, it's very difficult to do but I think that's absolutely essential.

Blanche Touhill: Let me ask you the question: If you were born 50 years before you were actually born, what would your life have been like?

Susan Elliott: Oh, my goodness, well, I was born in '37 so that would be late...1890.

Blanche Touhill: Would you have been an entrepreneur?

Susan Elliott: I don't know if I would have been able to. I know that my grandmother rode the Iron Mountain Railroad into the second Mary Institute down on Locust Street and when my parents wanted to go out for Sunday dinner to Busch's Grove, it had to be by horse and buggy. So, I mean, we're talking about a really long time ago. I don't know that a woman could have been an entrepreneur then and certainly no computers to be able to take advantage of. I don't know, that's an interesting question. I'd have to...maybe I'll have to do some research.

Blanche Touhill: Did you feel at any time that the 1964 Civil Rights Act or the reauthorization, the contracts, that if you had a contract with the federal government, you had to have an Affirmative Action plan or Title Nine? Did any of that really directly affect you? Were you aware that that would affect your business or affect your life or your daughters' life?

Susan Elliott: Not from that standpoint but we did have a couple of interesting women business enterprise experiences. Monsanto, again, a long-time client, wanted us to get our national certification because the government, they would get bene points with the government for that certification. So we went to Chicago and it was very clear that in Chicago they thought we were shills for some men who were really running a business back here. So we called it "guilty until proven innocent," and it took two years to prove to them that we actually were a women-owned business enterprise. So, with that final, finally have that success, we thought, "Well, the next is the state of Missouri" so we go to Missouri and they've done all the due diligence, they visited our office, they'd seen everything that was going on and we got all ready to be certified and they said, "Oops, no, your SSE shares are in your husband's...he's the beneficiary of your revocable trust. Therefore, it can't be your business." So fortunately, because Howard had worked in Jeff City for four years, we had some contacts and they gave us a temporary certification and then changed that rule the following year. But those are just two examples of women business experiences. But again, between passion and perseverance, you don't let anything stand in your way. You just solve the problems.

Blanche Touhill: Has your volunteer activity or the International Women's Forum, what effect have those groups had on your career or your person, your life?

Susan Elliott: Both. I think they've been very significant for multiple reasons. First of all, Ginny Masters, who founded it, and I was blessed to be a charter

member with her, was someone who was an incredibly accomplished entrepreneur in her own right so I had a high regard for her. I remember I had quit IBM at that point and I said, "Do you still want me in this organization because I don't have a full business yet or I don't have a job someplace"; "Oh, no, absolutely," she said, "that's not the point. These are women who will make a difference in their specific world of expertise," so it didn't have to be business...art, religion, whatever...philosophy. So through the years, I think that was the same kind of networking that I was able to do with executives that I would meet on boards, is, you connect and then you get referred to somebody and I think that makes me articulate, I think even today that if there is a woman who is a head of business or a head of something, that there is a connection, if you, as a business person, go to them and it might help, give SSE the opportunity to get some business, just because of that, "Okay, we're out here to help each other. Let's see what would work." I know I met Diane Sullivan when she first came to Brown Shoe and offered to help her get acquainted with the city and then we got her into the International Women's Forum and so I think it's all about looking after each other and besides, it's just a great group of people and we've all stayed friends through the years. So I always look forward to being with them when...

Blanche Touhill: Have you gone international at all? Are you a local company or a regional company?

Susan Elliott: No, we have national and some international, not a lot but what Elisabeth has built is, we opened an office in Jacksonville, Florida because we have a big contract down there that ultimately is with the Navy and we had to be down there where the naval air station is in Jacksonville. I had never wanted a second office. I felt it spread us too thin, financially, of course, but besides, you couldn't quality assure the work that was being done in all these other offices. Well, here she was, sort of put in a position where she had to open it in Jacksonville. Now we have about 80 people there and that's doing work for the government and the Navy that goes worldwide, among other things. So, again, she's just as much of an entrepreneur in her own right and one additional thing I would say, and this comes between Jack and Andy Taylor, and Jack Taylor said he felt like his expertise was doing what he did, was to start Enterprise Rent-A-Car and that it took Andy and his skills to build it and grow it and I think that

may be the same for us, that I love to start and do new things and I think Elisabeth has that ability to manage to grow, to build, set visions, strive for them.

Blanche Touhill: Are there other businesses owned by women that have done what you've done?

Susan Elliott: Well, I think Laura Haring and her daughter, Lauren, runs it now. I mean, there are people like Pat Whitaker at (Toures?) but that's a different kind of thing, and now, of course, IBM has a woman CEO, Jenny Romady and that was January 1 of 2012, which was their 100th anniversary. I mean, that's truly significant. Oh, that reminds me of a little...just recently, somebody sent me something they'd read on the internet, and this goes back to IBM, 1950, so it was eight years before I got started with them, "Effective immediately, women will not have to resign if they get married," and "Married women can be hired." So, eight years later, they were really on the forefront, actively recruiting women. They had violets on their brochures back then, which would probably be burned if...anybody who tried that today, and then they were very, very much on the forefront of diversities and seeking to hire them and bring them in to the organization.

Blanche Touhill: Was there salary equity at IBM, or did you know?

Susan Elliott: Well, you could be fired if you talked about it but there was a little bit of an undercurrent. No, I don't think I was paid the same thing as some of the men and I asked one manager about it once and he kind of blew me off. But I didn't pursue it because I loved what I was doing. So it was what it was.

Blanche Touhill: Is there something through your life that you really think held everything together and gave you the ability to go through problems, live through problems and just keep going and build, keep being positive? Are those the seven steps that you mentioned?

Susan Elliott: Well, yes, and it goes back to the passion and the perseverance, and I can give you a little story about that, but probably the most important person in my life is my husband. We're working on 52 years of marriage and he has been an incredible support system, you know, a businessman himself, high up in senior management at Laclede Gas and then he early retired because of some health problems in 1995 and just patient with me,

supportive, never got in my way, never really cares...I mean, he uses the computer but that's not the love of his life. So, there's no question about the fact that that solid underlying support made the difference for the...

Blanche Touhill: And your children obviously give that same support too.

Susan Elliott: Oh, sure, yes, and they do to their own children. I was going to come back to it...but I lost it for a minute so...

Blanche Touhill: Well, it will come back.

Susan Elliott: Yeah, right...the support system through the years.

Blanche Touhill: Well, there's no doubt that networking, if you're going to have a business, you have to have a network. But you didn't find that when you went with IBM or in your life as you were building your company, you felt men supported you as well as women?

Susan Elliott: Oh, absolutely, and it was a gentleman who supported me. When I wrote my book, the Business Journal did a big story on me which they do, with a picture and so one of the quotes was from General John Handy, he was a four-star general at Scot Air Force base, retired, and I had had the chance to meet him at one point and I said to him, "How do you get business with the government?" and at that time, he said to me, "If it's important to you, persevere." Well, so, when they asked him for a quote...this is multiple years later, the little quotes in the Business Journal...he says...and I have to paraphrase, "She came to me frustrated with trying to get business with the government but like a junkyard dog, she knuckled down and chewed on the leg of the government until she got their attention," and I just love that. And that's General John Handy, a fabulous man. We stay in touch...who couldn't have been more of a supporter.

Blanche Touhill: Do you still work with the schools?

Susan Elliott: Well, MICDS, to a certain extent. The one organization I'm working with now, newly, as of about six months ago, is called Arch Grants and I think it's really a good fit because their objective is to build St. Louis as an entrepreneurial hub, to bring entrepreneurs to St. Louis so last year, their first year, out of 400 applicants, they gave 15 \$50,000 grants to these 15 selected entrepreneurs. The objective is for them to stay here in St. Louis and they give them space, accounting, legal, all the support systems and

just a couple weeks ago, we announced 20 \$50,000 winners, or a million dollars and so I gradually am getting involved with that organization, on their board and they've just asked me to do a search for a new director. But it is a good fit because I can relate to the whole environment, with what I've gone through myself. So maybe it's just another way to pay forward and help others as they get out into this great big wide world that we're blessed to be in.

Blanche Touhill: Do you have anything else you want to talk about?

Susan Elliott: I feel like I've talked way too much. No, I've just been very blessed through the years to have so many opportunities to be here in St. Louis, to have our whole family here as a huge support system. Culturally, we have so much to offer and it's just helped me build and grow and I'd like to see all these other entrepreneurs have the same opportunity. I think St. Louis is a perfect place to help make it happen.

Blanche Touhill: So, you're involved in Arches, right?

Susan Elliott: Well, Arch Grants, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And what else are you doing?

Susan Elliott: I'm on the Science Center board still, after a long period of time and that's a good fit for me. I've been blessed to get other recognitions and awards through the years. I was an influential business woman and 10 years later, my daughter got the same thing.

Blanche Touhill: That's a real story. That is really wonderful.

Susan Elliott: That's St. Louis.

Blanche Touhill: And Laura Haring does that same thing?

Susan Elliott: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: You're right about mother/daughter. It's a wonderful, wonderful story. Do you think St. Louis in particular was a good place to be?

Susan Elliott: Well, I think so. I think a lot of us are fond of saying that it's a large small town and, again, with my whole family here: grandparents, parents, my sister's connections, our children's connections, the networking and the outreach to build a business has been sensational, for me personally, and

now for Elisabeth, because, in one way or another, our paths crossed, with all the people who are making a difference in St. Louis.

Blanche Touhill: Now, I know your book. Has that brought you a different vision of St. Louis?

Susan Elliott: No, the book hasn't but I must tell you, it was a journey all by itself, that I had no idea what I was embarking on because it was like starting a new business. You wear all the hats. Not only did you write it, but then you get it published and then you go speak about it and then, if you're invited out of town, you make your own airline reservations and your car trips and you keep your inventory and you have to have books shipped if you're going out of town. So it was like starting a whole new business.

Blanche Touhill: And it's exhaustive, but have you enjoyed it?

Susan Elliott: Oh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Of course, you meet a lot of people that you otherwise wouldn't meet.

Susan Elliott: You do, indeed, and one thing that I would really like to do, and maybe you can help me too, I still have some 1400 books in the basement in our office and I'm thinking I'd like to give them to libraries of engineering schools, technology schools, business schools and I just have to...

Blanche Touhill: I would urge you to do that. I would urge you to do that.

Susan Elliott: I need...

Blanche Touhill: We can talk about that.

Susan Elliott: Yeah...help in how I get them out and who might send them, and today, if I received a package...and I use these flat rate envelopes, I don't know that I'd open it. You don't know what's coming in, unknown packages from people you never heard of.

Blanche Touhill: Well, actually, I think that's a wonderful thing, if you would do it because, as a historian, I have to tell you, I have great faith in libraries as being the depositors of information and knowledge and what you have done is truly remarkable.

Susan Elliott: Well, I've just been very blessed but I would love your help on how to disseminate these and get them delivered.

Blanche Touhill: When you went to Smith, did you study math?

Susan Elliott: No, actually not. I didn't want to be holed up in a dorm, solving calculus problems and that kind of thing but there wasn't anything that I really cared to major in so I ended up choosing American Studies which was really a non-decision because you could be American art, history, philosophy, religion, literature, and so I could take a little bit of everything and not have to go deep down into anything in particular.

Blanche Touhill: Then, why did IBM hire you? Did you take a math test?

Susan Elliott: No, it was analytical, logical ability, they were looking for and I guess I have been blessed to think sort of in detail and digits and segments so it's very logical and a very orderly thought process and I think that's probably...I mean, that's what is used in designing computer programs and writing the computer programs. So it's a logical, orderly path to a solution. So I just was very fortunate, that's for sure.

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much. I really enjoyed this and it's really a study of an entrepreneur.

Susan Elliott: Well, I thank you for the privilege. It's exciting that you are looking to build some archives and, as I say, it's a real privilege to be involved. Thank you very much.