

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

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VICKI FRASER INTERVIEWED BY BLANCHE TOUHILL

Blanche Touhill: Introduce yourself.

Vicki Fraser: My name is Vicki Fraser.

Blanche Touhill: Vicki, would you talk about your youth: your family; how did you play when you were a child; did you have brothers and sisters, grandparents, cousins; your elementary school; your secondary school, and what I'm after is really, who said to you or encouraged you to sort of be what you've become or to say you have ability and you can do what you want to do. So talk about your youth.

Vicki Fraser: Sure, thanks, that's a pleasure. I grew up in Webster Groves. My father, Don Fraser, was a lawyer here in St. Louis. He had gone to St. Louis University and grown up on Waterman Avenue. He was one of five children. My mother was Barbara Fraser and she had a Master's Degree in Speech and Education and she was a teacher. She had grown up in Webster Groves. She had a brother and a sister, who are still here in St. Louis now. So I lived right up the street from my grandparents on my mother's side and my father's parents lived on Waterman. So we actually had many cousins so probably 20 cousins in St. Louis so we all grew up doing holidays together, doing activities together, spending the night at the grandparents' house or at cousins' homes. My grandparents on my mother's side had a farm in Sullivan, Missouri so we spent a lot of weekends at the farm riding horses, fishing, hunting, digging in the dirt, building, and it was really a very wonderful time. It was a safe time. We basically were able to run around and ride bikes somewhat unsupervised as children, all around Webster Groves and Kirkwood and I went to Holy Redeemer grade school and then I went to Nerinx Hall for high school and the University of Missouri for medical school.

Blanche Touhill: Stop with your elementary and secondary school. Were there teachers that said certain things to you, like, "Vicki, you're very good at math..." ...or science or biology or...

Vicki Fraser: You know, I went to Holy Redeemer which, at the time, almost all the teachers were Catholic and almost all of them were nuns and so there were a few lay teachers and I remember it as a really supportive environment where both the boys and the girls were encouraged to go to high school, go to college, do great things and I had a number of teachers who were really wonderful role models and very inspiring and the priests from Holy Redeemer were very active in the school as well. So, out of my 8th grade class, there were eight who went on to medical school.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness!

Vicki Fraser: Which does seem like a large number, given, I think we probably had a graduating class of 25 or 30.

Blanche Touhill: Well, now, of those eight, were their parents doctors?

Vicki Fraser: No.

Blanche Touhill: They just...

Vicki Fraser: I have an uncle, Dan Fraser, who is a surgeon and who was head of surgery at St. Mary's and a very active thoracic surgeon here in St. Louis who was a wonderful role model but I think growing up, that people were really very encouraging about education and about providing service to the community and doing things that you loved. So I wanted to go into healthcare, I think, pretty much when I was in high school and I thought about the law for a while because of my father and I looked at nursing as an opportunity as well and I was lucky enough to volunteer at the old Fermin Desloge Hospital down on Grand which is affiliated with St. Louis University and is now a Tenet hospital and I worked with some extraordinary nurses there and I was a candy striper, got to volunteer and work in the hospital and really, even there, the nurses encouraged me to go into medicine.

Blanche Touhill: Really?

Vicki Fraser: Yeah, and so they were, I think, incredible individuals. They took really great care of patients. They were very smart, hardworking but at that

time, there was a pretty distinct hierarchy between physicians and nurses and most of the physicians were male and most of the nurses were female and I think the nurses realized that, given the chance, that women could be physicians and could be successful in academic medicine and they were very supportive and encouraging.

Blanche Touhill: Did anybody say to you women can't be doctors?

Vicki Fraser: Yes, and I think it wasn't always meant in a negative way. I think people had...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, that's true.

Vicki Fraser: People had realistic concerns that women have important roles as mothers and as family members and how would one balance having children and what would happen if you were pregnant or what would happen if your husband had a big job, and would there be flexibility and was it too hard or too male-dominated, and so I think that's still a very important thing for people to think about, in terms of their careers, how hard do they want to work; how long do they want to be in school. I think you have to really love medicine. It takes a really long time and it's not easy. So it's not for everybody and you certainly don't want to go through that kind of education and training if you're not going to love it and be incredibly happy. And I think nursing is an incredibly honorable profession. We need great nurses and we need great male nurses and great female nurses just like we need great male and female physicians. So, I thought that I would be happier as a physician than a nurse. I have a little bit of a bossy streak, I've been told and I thought that I would be better off trying to learn as much as I could and help care for patients in that way.

Blanche Touhill: When you went to high school, were there other girls in your high school that wanted to be doctors?

Vicki Fraser: You know, I went to Nerinx Hall, which at the time was an extraordinary experience for me. It's an all-women's Catholic high school and I was there shortly after there was kind of a controversial event in which some Loretta Sisters and some priests were involved in the anti-war movement and had thrown red paint over some files at a chemical company and so Nerinx was perceived a little bit at the time as maybe a little too far out

there, a little too liberal, a little too progressive and it was also at the time when the nuns stopped wearing habits and...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how interesting, as a young person, to be in a school where they come in...

Vicki Fraser: Right, they looked like regular people. They didn't look like nuns anymore. They weren't dressed in formal habits and weren't all covered up. The nuns at Nerinx were incredibly well educated and politically active and they were really...I mean, we kind of tease that Nerinx has a philosophy of really raising empowered women and I think they were very serious about that and they did that incredibly well. So I was encouraged to take four years of science, four years of math...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, so you said in high school, "I think I want to be a doctor," and they responded in that way, by advising you to take science and math?

Vicki Fraser: Yes and they had great science and math but they also wanted you to take four years of English and four years of history and art and music. So they wanted you to do everything. I think, if anything, the thing...I didn't take any religion at Nerinx which is probably a little different than most people but that was an elective, not a requirement and in order to take four years of science, math and history and English and everything else I wanted to take, I didn't take religion. I thought I had enough religion. And so the teachers I think were really extraordinary. They taught us how to write very well. They taught us how to think critically. I was able to play basketball at Nerinx and those team sports, I think, helped a lot and made a difference.

Blanche Touhill: How did they make a difference?

Vicki Fraser: You know, I actually tried out for the basketball team in my freshman year and did not make the team and that was sort of devastating emotionally and it made me realize, you can't always win; you can't always get what you want; things don't come easily and you have to work really hard if you want to get something. So I was actually able to play on a different Catholic girls' team that was sort of a pick-up team in South St. Louis with an extraordinary coach and so I still got to play. I learned a lot and then I tried out and was able to play as a sophomore. I never was really very good so we should just go on record to clarify that...

Blanche Touhill: But you liked the camaraderie.

Vicki Fraser: Oh, it was wonderful.

Blanche Touhill: And you liked the game.

Vicki Fraser: It's a great sport, great game. I learned a lot. We got to play teams all over St. Louis and the coach, Marcella Sweeney, was our biology teacher and our basketball coach at the time and she was pretty rough and tumble and she would whack people, in a loving way, if they were messing around and she would call people out. But it actually was great physical activity and it kept people busy and out of trouble and so I was able to play basketball a little bit in college also. But I think that is a great experience for women also.

Blanche Touhill: Did you play in grade school?

Vicki Fraser: I did.

Blanche Touhill: And so that's why you thought you could go into the high school?

Vicki Fraser: Exactly, so they Catholic school system, CYC sports, I think, are really wonderful because they cultivate volleyball, field hockey, basketball, softball, for girls and for boys from very young ages. So often the Catholic schools are really quite good at soccer and field hockey and so we did, we had multiple teams and Ted Pepple was my basketball coach in grade school and we drove all over St. Louis playing at little Catholic schools and it was really a great experience.

Blanche Touhill: I assume the CYC also took children that went to public schools?

Vicki Fraser: Yes, yes.

Blanche Touhill: So it was really, you met people from all over?

Vicki Fraser: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Well, from your neighborhood but then when you moved to other places...

Vicki Fraser: So, back in the old days, as I remember it, it pretty much was parish-based teams that were kids from your school and your grade and the parents were the coaches and so they were volunteer coaches and there

were all sorts of levels and sometimes there were one, two, or three teams per grade, depending on the number of kids in the school size. Now, for my kids growing up, my kids played soccer, volleyball and a little bit of basketball and softball for Immaculata because we lived down the street from there, even though my children aren't in Catholic schools, aren't raised Catholic; they're Jewish, and the Immaculata and CYC system was actually very nurturing and supportive of my kids. So it was a great experience for them also.

Blanche Touhill: So, that's interesting, that the lines are crossed.

Vicki Fraser: Yes, and it was very interesting because as a parent then, from my kids playing, I ran into parents who I had played against when I was a kid and who I had gone to school with and most of their kids were in Catholic schools but that was a really wonderful opportunity also.

Blanche Touhill: How many girls were in Nerinx?

Vicki Fraser: So, I think in our graduating class, it was about 100.

Blanche Touhill: So it's about a 400 student school?

Vicki Fraser: Mm-hmm, Grade 9 through 12. They had extraordinary theatre, music, art programs but very strong sciences, I think, also for the time.

Blanche Touhill: So then you went to college?

Vicki Fraser: Then I went to college.

Blanche Touhill: Where did you go?

Vicki Fraser: I went to William Woods College in Fulton, Missouri. I desperately wanted to get out of St. Louis. My parents were hoping that I would go to St. Louis University but I was eager to try to get away a little bit and I was offered a scholarship to go there and play basketball and I think, from my parents' point of view, I also looked at the University of Missouri and some other schools that were larger. I think my parents were very concerned that a small nurturing school might be a sort of safer environment if I was going to go away.

Blanche Touhill: How did William Woods react to your idea of being a doctor?

Vicki Fraser: Well, William Woods, at the time, was an all girls' school and Westminster College, which is kind of its partner school right down the road, was an all men's school and most of the science was at Westminster College and I took all of my classes, actually, at Westminster College. So, it felt a little bit like I went to an all men's college so I think I took maybe one class at William Woods College. So it was a great school for me. Fulton is a beautiful town and they had really strong biology, chemistry and Nerinx had prepared me really pretty well so when I got there, I tested out of some of the basic sciences so I was able to take advanced anatomy and physiology as a freshman and some advanced chemistry classes which were very stressful because initially they did not go well for me.

Blanche Touhill: Were you the only women or the number of few women in the chemistry class?

Vicki Fraser: No, there were a few so there were probably between 5 and 10 women in most of the science classes that I took.

Blanche Touhill: Out of how many?

Vicki Fraser: Out of probably 50 in most of the classes. I was the only freshman taking advanced chemistry. I was the only freshman taking anatomy and physiology and so I was way in over my head and flunked the first exam, did terribly in calculus initially and so I had a steep learning curve to study.

Blanche Touhill: How did you get out of the hole?

Vicki Fraser: Studied really hard. I really was quite afraid. I certainly did not want to fail. I had never had to study that hard and so I think I really...I talked to the teachers and I talked to some seniors about what to expect and the first test, I think, was an eye-opener about what the expectations were. So I spent a lot more time really studying, memorizing, doing practice tests and working with others so that...for anatomy and physiology, basically you would have an exam where they had bones of every type of animal and the bones would all be laid out and you had to go around and know all the bones. So it was a huge amount of memorization in addition to understanding the physiology.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I know that the anatomy and physiology is a course that really sometimes divides those who are going on and those who aren't going on in the sciences.

Vicki Fraser: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And that's what the nursing students also take, anatomy and physiology and they were always saying, "Oh, that's the course...if I can get through that, I'm going to be all right."

Vicki Fraser: I think so. For many pre-medical curriculums, the expectation in the past, if you were pre-med was that you would take biology your freshman year, chemistry your first year and calculus so that is a lot all together and it is a weeding out process, which is unfortunate because I think often freshman year in college is a hard time for many kids who could excel if they were given a little more time or if they had better orientation and study time and study skills or maturity.

Blanche Touhill: And I think the universities today or what we would call in the university Missouri system, supplemental instruction or tutoring, special tutoring or letting somebody read your freshman essay to make sure that...they wouldn't write it for you but they'd sort of read it as the professor would read it and give you feedback before you turn it in.

Vicki Fraser: That's great.

Blanche Touhill: And all those kinds of supports with the theory that if you get into a school that has high standards, then you should be able to be all right and that freshman semester is such a culture shock, I think, more than...so really, you lived at William Woods?

Vicki Fraser: I did.

Blanche Touhill: You had the socialization with the women but you went practically every day over to Westminster?

Vicki Fraser: Correct. They had a little bus that went between the campuses or I rode my bike pretty much, most of the time.

Blanche Touhill: And so, by the end of the first year, you were all right?

Vicki Fraser: Yeah, by the end of the first semester, I had sort of recovered so all went well.

Blanche Touhill: Were you a leader in high school or grade school or college?

Vicki Fraser: I don't really think of myself that way but in retrospect, I was the president of the senior class at Nerinx and during medical school, I was very active in the student council and in the honor council and very active with the administration, to help with policies and procedures related to student ethics, student performance and I served as a faculty/student liaison.

Blanche Touhill: Did you make friends, permanent friends at all these places?

Vicki Fraser: I have. I still have great friends from high school, some of whom live in St. Louis but not all of whom, that we keep in touch regularly. I have friends from college and friends from medical school. I think for medical trainees, you often have extraordinary relationships that also develop during your house staff training, your internship and residency so after medical school, I went to the University of Colorado to be an intern and a resident and we have really extraordinary colleagues from that period.

Blanche Touhill: So you still meet them?

Vicki Fraser: I see them at medical meetings and now, I try to recruit their kids to come to Washington University for college so we stay in close touch.

Blanche Touhill: Wonderful! Does Washington U have one of those pre-high school, you know, where you are identified, if the student has an interest in medicine?

Vicki Fraser: So, we actually have a couple grants that we put together through the Clinical Research Training Center to foster research aptitude, research exposure and science exposure in the stem field. So we have what's called the Aspire program and that takes high school students or college students and embeds them in Washington University with mentors doing clinical research, translational or basic science research. They spend the summer with us and they take a course in biostatistics or designing clinical research. They go to seminars and meet with senior faculty and the Division of Biology and Biomedical Sciences at the Medical School, the Ph.D. program, also runs special programs in the summer for undergraduates, for members of underrepresented minorities, for women to try to enhance diversity among the sciences and the kids who participate in those programs are extraordinary. I think, with additional

mentoring and exposure, it provides them insight into career opportunities and helps them really think about science as a career, think about graduate school, medical school. So we need more of those kind of programs.

Blanche Touhill: Were you instrumental in the founding of those programs, the grant-getting?

Vicki Fraser: I was. I was an English major in college as well as a biology major so I do like to write and I like to write grants. That's probably a little sick to say because writing grants is very time-consuming and sometimes frustrating because the funding levels are not always what you would like. But the Clinical Research Training Center, I was the original PI of the Career Development Award Program and that was to help physicians learn to do clinical research and to provide protected time, mentored research training and a specific curriculum to help them become academicians and stay in medicine and do clinical research and I had extraordinary mentors and partners in that so Ken Polanski, who was the former chairman of Medicine, Phil Crier, who was the former head of the Endocrine Division, helped me and taught me how to write grants. Brad Evenoff, who's the head of the Division of General Medical Sciences, wrote the grant to develop a Master's of Science in Clinical Investigation curriculum and Jay Piccarillo, who's an ENT surgeon, really was focused on undergraduates and pre-docs and so the three of us put three separate grants in together, one for undergraduates, one for the curriculum and one for junior faculty and those all got funded in one year. So we were really very excited and then later we were able to roll those into an even bigger grant to provide more training and support that included undergraduates, high school students, summer students and now we try to reach out to all the training grants throughout the university, so St. Louis University participates; the School of Public Health participates; UMSL participates. It's part of the Institute of Clinical and Translational Sciences which I think has been really a great asset for the region.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I know that a lot of universities are building those summer programs but what I find is interesting is how medical education is reaching out into the high school. I would expect...well, I really wouldn't have expected them to even go into the undergraduate. There was always sort of a line or a wall, wasn't there? I mean, at least that's my

perception and what you're describing is now, no, there are bridges across all those various academic areas in helping people who really say, "I think I would like to have some aspect of medicine or research in order to..."

Vicki Fraser: Right. You know, the United States and many parts of the world really are challenged by having inadequate science, technology, engineering and math. It's particularly problematic for underrepresented minorities; it's problematic for women, and we need to have pipelines and we need to expose kids and train them very early on because you can't get a kid who's not had adequate science or math training through high school and then expect them to love engineering or medicine when they're in college. I think you really have to get them excited about science and scientific principles and they have to have strong foundations in science and math from grade school and high school so they'll continue to excel and you have to help them love it and know that it's going to be fun and interesting and that they can do it so they don't quit. There's, I think, a big challenge for girls, where they are pretty equal in math and science to a point and then they stop feeling equal and they drop out and so I think there's a lot of emphasis now on how do you help people stay and be engaged in stem careers. So some schools in the region...MICDS is one...have built extraordinary stem facilities through some very generous donations from key civic leaders in the region and I think that's going to be a game changer. And many of the high schools in the region are really enhancing their IT and their computer science and their training so that people are prepared for jobs as well as graduate school.

Blanche Touhill: Mm-hmm. Well, let's go on to your sophomore, junior and senior at Westminster. Anything there pop up?

Vicki Fraser: So, I actually graduated from college in three years. At the time, college was expensive. My parents paid for my college education so I was able to graduate without any school debts which was really wonderful but I had enough AP credits from Nerinx that, back in the old days, they actually let you graduate in three years. I'm not sure they let people do that anymore. So I was able to graduate in three years and then I went to the University of Missouri as a graduate student for a year and...

Blanche Touhill: What did you study?

Vicki Fraser: I studied biology and physiology and I did research with Dr. Helen Mullen at the Medical School, studying cellular immunology and that was a really great experience. Then I went to medical school.

Blanche Touhill: Why was it a great experience?

Vicki Fraser: Well, it was, again, a much higher level of science, much larger classes. It was, I was in a biology class with 200 students at a graduate level, so much more...

Blanche Touhill: At a graduate level?

Vicki Fraser: Yeah, so much more...and again, these are sort of the hard classes where they're big classes in the beginning. And graduate school was really fun and interesting because it was much more analytical and much more thinking, less memorizing, more problem-solving, lots of hands-on research and it was much more technical but fascinating. So it made my medical school year much easier because medical school I think is still a bit focused on memorization and not so much the problem-solving and thinking that you aspire to in graduate school.

Blanche Touhill: Did you think of other medical schools besides Columbia?

Vicki Fraser: You know, I applied to a number of medical schools and I got into Mizzou and was thrilled to go to the University of Missouri.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I figured, you spent a year there.

Vicki Fraser: I loved it. It is a great medical school. It's very hands-on. Right now they have problem-based learning. They have a unique curriculum where they didn't have this when I was there but now, it's well known for engaging even first year medical students in learning about medical problems. As they teach anatomy and physiology, they're learning about heart attacks and they're learning about asthma and they're learning about chronic lung disease and diabetes. So it's a really integrated form of education so the medical students there, I think, get great learning and are great house staff because they've been thinking about patients and diseases for all four of their years.

Blanche Touhill: When I graduated from high school, some of the boys in my class went on to college and then went to the University of Missouri – Columbia Medical School because that was the early days of that school and they

said, at that time, it was very hands-on, very much clinical. It wasn't going to be a research focused institution. Your experience was how to do it and how to analyze the problems and work for the solutions.

Vicki Fraser: Exactly. I think the University of Missouri plays a very important role in medical education. Their goal is to train physicians who want to stay and practice and take care of patients in the State of Missouri. They have a heavy emphasis on family practice. They were one of the top ranked programs in family practice nationally. They have a strong commitment to rural health and underserved populations but they have research as well so at the time I went there, I thought I was going to be a family practice doctor. I thought I was going to practice in a rural area, in a small town and so my career evolved in a different direction but I think the foundation and the training I got at the University of Missouri were really wonderful.

Blanche Touhill: Why did you select Colorado?

Vicki Fraser: So, at the time, I was really thinking about...I liked everything in medical school: I liked medicine, surgery, pediatrics, OB, and I liked family practice. I decided on internal medicine really because it was the most scholarly, I thought, the most analytic, the people that knew the most about patient care and complex diseases and I looked all over the country and I was going to go to the University of California at San Francisco and then I was going to rank Colorado second, so at the time...we do matches so you interview and you put in your rank list and there's a computer generated rank list and the programs rank you and then you end up, you find out in March on match day where you're going to go and I had done a rotation at UCSF in the San Francisco General ER which was extraordinary but during the time of kind of waiting, after I had turned in my match list, I was working on the Indian reservation in Winslow, Arizona and I just started having second thoughts about whether I would be happier in Colorado, in Denver, or at UCSF. And so I called and changed my rank list, which I actually wasn't sure you could do that but the guy was very nice and so I flipped my ranking for Colorado first and Colorado was an incredible place to train. I had great teachers, great mentors. We took care of really sick patients. There was a lot of emphasis on education. I met my husband there and I have great friends from that time.

Blanche Touhill: Was he an intern too?

Vicki Fraser: He was an intern also, Steve Miller. So Colorado was a great, great place to train and at the time we did internship and residency, there were no duty work hour restrictions so we were on call every third night and you stayed up all night until the work was done and we got one day off a month and that was progressive and liberal and we would ski on that day.

Blanche Touhill: And may I ask what you earned?

Vicki Fraser: I think that our salaries were about \$24,000 as an intern which, at the time, we thought was a lot of money. So we felt rich. You know, we had an apartment, paid bills and we worked so we didn't have anything to spend money on anyway because you were working all the time.

Blanche Touhill: How long did that last?

Vicki Fraser: I did three years of residency and then I was a chief resident for a fourth year.

Blanche Touhill: And was that exciting?

Vicki Fraser: It was a great experience. So the chief residents in internal medicine are chosen to be the bridge between the house staff and the faculty so it's an administrative role. You do a lot of teaching of medical students of house staff. You make the schedules; you arbitrate difficulties; it's a lot of people management, and it's a bridge to a faculty position. You also learn to attend and take care of patients and so it's a great job. It's a really great job.

Blanche Touhill: So then you get out, you're finally out of your residency and then what?

Vicki Fraser: Steve Miller and I...he was not my husband then...we took a year off and we traveled around the world backpacking so we worked in St. Lucia, we worked in Africa...

Blanche Touhill: Did you work as a doctor?

Vicki Fraser: Yes, so we were volunteer physicians. We had done some moonlighting while we were residents to save up money so that we could be unemployed for a year. That was a relatively common thing from people who were chief residents at Colorado, they would take a year off because you had to apply for your fellowship a year in advance so there was this

one year opportunity and, because people are so intrigued with the mountains in Colorado, there was also a very strong tradition of going to Nepal and hiking and climbing mountains in Nepal.

Blanche Touhill: Did you do that?

Vicki Fraser: We did, we walked the Annapurna Circuit which was an incredible experience. So we were gone for about nine months backpacking basically and then we came back and started our fellowships at Washington University.

Blanche Touhill: Okay, now stop. When you traveled like that and you went all over the world, let's say you get to someplace. Did you then walk into a health center and say, "I'm willing to volunteer my time" or did you write ahead of time?

Vicki Fraser: We had arranged ahead of time to work and we had a somewhat loose schedule so we had a plane ticket to get to London and then we took trains and we knew we had to meet someone in Nepal about seven months later and we met someone in Africa in Tanzania but pretty much the rest was unscheduled so we would just take the train or bike and go as far as we could and then find a place to stay, usually in pensiones or Bed & Breakfasts. Sometimes we couldn't find a place to stay and we would have to stay in the train station or something like that but we had made arrangements to work ahead of time.

Blanche Touhill: And they accepted your credentials?

Vicki Fraser: Yes. So back in the old days, it was easier to actually work in resource limited settings. They were often desperate for physicians and would accept people's credentials and provide coverage. So I was able to work in a number of places throughout my career. I worked at St. Lucia with Steve when we were traveling, after our chief resident year, but I worked in Haiti when I was an internal medicine resident at the Albert Schweitzer Hospital and then when I was older, my daughters and I worked in Africa and in Honduras and Costa Rica and in Peru on volunteer medical missions. There's a Peruvian American Medical Society here in St. Louis with doctors from St. Luke's mostly who do wonderful missions that are incredibly organized, every year and they were very gracious to let us go with them.

Blanche Touhill: And your daughters went as?

Vicki Fraser: Becky was in high school and Hallie was in grade school and then in high school and they went and worked as well so Hallie was a translator, she spoke Spanish very well and in Africa they both worked as pharmacy assistants. They would transcribe medical records. They'd help with wound care and fill medicines and prescribe and they worked in orphanages. So they've been, I think, very interested in civil rights and human services and community service since they were kids as well.

Blanche Touhill: Now, I'm going to talk about three other things and then I'm going to come back to when you get the fellowship and your professional career and how you made your way back into being the chief of the medical...what is it, the medical service?

Vicki Fraser: Chief of the Department of Medicine.

Blanche Touhill: But first I'd like to ask, would you comment on the International Women's Forum.

Vicki Fraser: So, you know, I feel incredibly honored and privileged to have been invited to join the International Women's Forum. It has provided me with the opportunity to meet women leaders from diverse backgrounds and they're incredibly welcoming and gracious. Because of my job as a physician, I know a lot of doctors and I spend a lot of time in science and in hospitals and so being able to meet women lawyers and real estate agents and historians and educators is really impactful. They have a lot to teach me and I'm very appreciative.

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

Vicki Fraser: You know, that's a great question because I think about what was different then so if I think about how my mother grew up or how my grandmother grew up, that's probably the best frame of reference. So my mother grew up at a time when...she really had the benefit of education also. She went to Webster University and was encouraged to go to graduate school and went to St. Louis University for graduate school and was pursuing a Ph.D. but was basically told that she should stop with a terminal degree as a Master's Degree because women really shouldn't pursue Ph.D.s at that time and she did. There really was no fighting it at that point. But she was an extraordinary educator. She was a great

teacher. She taught grade school and high school but I think, if I were in her position 50 years ago, I wouldn't have gone to medical school; I would have gone to nursing school because I think no one would have thought it possible. There are a few women around who actually were the first women medical students. Even at Washington University, many of those original women who got into medical school had a first name that did not identify them as female and so I'm very appreciative of them for the ground-breaking work they did in making it possible.

Blanche Touhill:

What year was she at St. Louis U? What was the area?

Vicki Fraser:

She was a speech and drama Ph.D. student and I'd have to calculate back for years so...

Blanche Touhill:

Oh, you don't have to do that.

Vicki Fraser:

My mother probably now would be almost 83...85, so...

Blanche Touhill:

I think theater has always been very...well, all the Ph.D. programs were sort of closed. Well, everything was sort of closed except nursing, secretaries...

Vicki Fraser:

And teachers.

Blanche Touhill:

Teachers and maybe a librarian or something like that. Have you gotten any award or awards that you really treasure?

Vicki Fraser:

I think one of my...most favorite award is the Mentor Award from the Academic Women's Network. So I received that a few years ago and that is related to, I think, my commitment to help young people and my interest and commitment to their education and their success. That's a real pleasure, for me, actually, to teach and to work with people to help them be successful in research and to help their career development. So it's nice to be recognized for that.

Blanche Touhill:

So let's turn back to your career because I know you started really in internal medicine...

Vicki Fraser:

Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill:

...and really not thinking of the academic world, and then you sort of combined them and moved over.

Vicki Fraser: So, I think it was...the University of Colorado is a very academic place so even though it's a state school and a very hands-on training program just like the University of Missouri, the chairman at the department, Dr. Robert Schrier who recently retired was an incredible mentor and he encouraged everybody to stay in academics and to teach and to do research and he helped people write papers and write book chapters. He was a force of nature, quite frankly and so, from that house staff training group that he mentored and sponsored, there are a number of people who have been very successful and who have gone on to be division heads and department chairs and who have stayed in academics. I think he also cultivated a few deans. So I went into infectious disease basically after my experience in Haiti. I had been thinking about geriatrics and pulmonary...again, I liked a lot of specialties but when I was in Haiti, I was really struck by the morbidity and mortality of infectious diseases globally still. I saw typhoid, I saw the very beginning of the AIDS epidemic, I saw horrible parasites: tuberculosis, tetanus, neonatal tetanus which is extraordinarily uncommon, except in resource limited settings and is a vaccine preventable disease. So I got very excited about doing infectious disease and at the time, Steve and I were going through...they didn't have a couples match back then but he was going into renal and I was going into infectious disease so we looked for places that were really strong in both renal and infectious disease and so Washington University was really at the top of the list.

Blanche Touhill: So you came here?

Vicki Fraser: We came here.

Blanche Touhill: And that was your fellowship for a year or two years?

Vicki Fraser: I did three years of fellowship so one year of clinical work taking care of patients on the in-patient side and doing infectious disease consults and then two years of research and then I joined the faculty.

Blanche Touhill: Ah, so you crossed over?

Vicki Fraser: I did cross over.

Blanche Touhill: And how did you like teaching?

Vicki Fraser: I love teaching.

Blanche Touhill: And you love to write.

Vicki Fraser: I do love to write. So I think that makes it a good fit for academics and the infectious disease service at the time was run by Jerry Madoff who is an extraordinary role model and mentor to me so he basically encouraged me to study healthcare epidemiology. I was going to go into a basic science lab and work with Charlie Rice and do virology and Jerry was like, "We got lots of virologists. We have lots of basic scientists. No one is doing healthcare epidemiology. That's really important. Why don't you do that." So I did. I started studying hospital acquired infections and I worked with Lee Robbins in Psychiatry actually, to learn epidemiologic methods. Jerry paid for me to go to the University of Michigan and take some courses in the summer at the School of Public Health there and then, really, the infection control nurses of Barnes Jewish Hospital Jewish Hospital adopted me and they really taught me infection control and we built databases to identify what the common infections were, what the most prevalent organisms were, what the costs of the infections were, what the outcomes were, what the death rates were, and when we started, they used to keep all the data on index cards in boxes because there were no computers back then really, not personal computers and so we had the tremendous advantage of building computer systems when the PCs became available so that people could do surveillance and track infections and then we really tried to do something different and develop interventions to lower infection rates.

Blanche Touhill: And is that your specialty now, really?

Vicki Fraser: It is.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have a hard time moving up the ranks? Do you have an associate, assistant associate, do you have tenure? Do you have that system in the medical school?

Vicki Fraser: We do. The medical school has three tracks: they have a research track; they have a tenure track and they have a clinician educator track.

Blanche Touhill: And which are you?

Vicki Fraser: I am on the tenure track and at Washington University, tenure is granted at the time you're promoted to associate professor so there is a time clock.

- Blanche Touhill: And you have to publish?
- Vicki Fraser: You have to publish. You have to get grants and you have to have national, international recognition for an area. So I was very lucky.
- Blanche Touhill: You worked hard.
- Vicki Fraser: I worked hard. I was able to get grants from the CDC to study hospital acquired infections from NIOSH to study occupational injuries: tuberculosis exposures; blood-born pathogens; needle stick injuries, and we also got grants to develop a special care center for women with HIV which was kind of another part of my life because I was one of the few women doctors at the time and there were not that many women with AIDS. Most of the people who had AIDS were men. I ended up with all the women with AIDS because they would just come to me and so we wrote a grant to provide wrap-around services and total integrated care for women with HIV and families with HIV and so that was a really great experience.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, you got in at the beginning of a lot of changes...
- Vicki Fraser: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And at the beginning of the computers into medicine and then into things like HIV and, really, the hospital problem that has plagued this country for a long time. It's now beginning to be identified, don't you think, in recent years?
- Vicki Fraser: Yeah. No, at the time I started in infection prevention, there were not national registries, very much of the CDC had done some large studies looking at what the frequency was but there was very little research on hospital acquired infections. There were very few prevention strategies, very little infrastructure funding. Most infection control programs were these incredibly hard-working nurses, pretty much working by themselves, trying to protect patients.
- Blanche Touhill: And they didn't have time to do the research aspect of it.
- Vicki Fraser: Correct.
- Blanche Touhill: Where you were focused on what would cause all this and how do we solve it.

Vicki Fraser: The CDC funding actually made a huge difference so that allowed us to do research and then we were also very lucky to have extraordinary fellows and so I had junior faculty and fellows and some undergraduates and medical students who worked with us, who made a tremendous difference.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about becoming the chair. I know that in academics, it's not an easy post to take and I just wondered, how did that come about?

Vicki Fraser: So, it was not a job I aspired to. We had a really great chairman of medicine, Ken Polanski who was an endocrinologist from South Africa who was a really great mentor and he was recruited to the University of Chicago to become the dean and so he announced he was leaving and we were all distraught. So they had to have an interim chair and then they had to have a national search to identify the new chair. So the dean and Ken asked me to be the interim chair, which was pretty terrifying but they talked me into it basically and said that it would be all right and they would help me and Ken was extraordinary. He basically let me follow him around for about three months before he left, orienting me to everything that was going on. I had been a division head. I had been the co-director of the Infectious Disease Division and I had managed people and budgets and programs but the Department of Medicine is much bigger. We have 500 faculty members, 2000 employees, a big budget and cardiology and pulmonary, multiple specialties. So it was my intent to just be the interim and have them have a national search and then they would identify who they selected. So there's a search committee but ultimately they asked me if I would like to be considered and the longer I did the job as the interim, the more I felt confident that it was a great job and it would be an extraordinary opportunity and I would like to do it if I were selected. So I felt like I should at least give it a try and so I asked that I be considered and so they went through the national search and had external and internal candidates and I went through the interview process like everybody else and ultimately I was offered the job. So I was the interim for about a year-and-a-half and then I was offered the job and I negotiated, took a little while so I've been the chairman since October of 2013.

Blanche Touhill: How many women in the country get those jobs?

Vicki Fraser: So, increasing numbers. It's still a minority but the head of Medicine at Duke is female, Mary Cloitman; the head of Medicine at Vanderbilt, Nancy Brown is female; the head of Toronto, Wendy Levin is female; the head of Mass General, just recently has recruited...and there are a number so I would say probably maybe 15 across the country.

Blanche Touhill: What do you like about the job?

Vicki Fraser: You know, I like the people. We have extraordinary physicians, scientists, nurses who really care about patients and who care about advancing science and finding cures and better treatments, better diagnostic strategies and who are very committed teachers. So, it's an incredible job because you get to deal with very complex challenges with wonderfully smart people and you get to teach and so there's a lot of young people and a lot of career development, some difficult financial challenges right now just because of the economy and the NIH budget and the changes in healthcare reform. I think those are really looming challenges but medical education is really important. We have a tremendous shortage of physicians. We have dramatically changed the way we educate physicians and disease is so much more complex that we need to continue to evolve the way we train physicians and healthcare workers in general and we need to transform the way we deliver healthcare to make sure that we're taking care of everybody.

Blanche Touhill: I know you have a superb professional life but do you want to talk about your husband and your children and how do you merge two physicians and two children?

Vicki Fraser: So, I have an incredible family. I feel very lucky. I wouldn't be able to do anything I do at work without having an incredibly supportive husband. My husband, Steve Miller, is the vice president at Express Scripts. He is a physician originally, a nephrologist and then was vice president at Barnes Jewish Hospital and the chief medical officer before he was recruited to Express Scripts and he has always encouraged me. He is a great role model, a great mentor. He's always on my side and he's encouraged me to take bigger jobs. In fact, he teases continuously that I need to take a second job so he can retire to play more golf but it's not going to happen, and we have three kids...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, three, pardon me.

Vicki Fraser: Well, we have 24-year-old twins, Jake Miller, who is a financial analyst at Stifel Nicolaus , Becky Miller, who works for Ketchum, a PR and marketing firm in Washington, D.C. and her big challenges right now are Ketchum is responsible for providing PR and marketing to try to make Russia look better which is particularly difficult when they're invading other countries and when Putin is somewhat out of control. Our youngest daughter is 21 and she will be a junior at Northwestern University in a couple weeks.

Blanche Touhill: And what is she going to study?

Vicki Fraser: She is studying mathematical modeling for the social sciences and she's also an econ major so it's an incredibly interesting major that's very focused on analytic methods, math, big data and I think she's enjoying that very much.

Blanche Touhill: Do they ever talk about when they went abroad with you or your husband to do medical research or help people?

Vicki Fraser: You know, we've taken great family vacations and I think my husband has been very good at planning vacations so all of our kids ski really well. I've now become the worst skier so they all are much better skiers than we are and they went to MICDS and had a great education there where they were really exposed to, I think, great teachers and great coaches. So they very much loved their experience there and I think they've tolerated having two parents that were doctors. They've gone on trips with us but Steve and I both adjusted our schedules so that we could go to all of our kids' sporting activities, all of their events at school and I think we were pretty careful to juggle as much as we could and then we had the real luxury of having grandparents in town. That also helped.

Blanche Touhill: Do you want to comment on a young woman deciding, years ago, to be a doctor and making her way through the medical world?

Vicki Fraser: I'm really glad that I did this. I have been very happy in my job. I love being a doctor. I love working with patients. I don't think I ever anticipated that it would end up this way but I think that's one of the really exciting parts about medicine, is that there are so many career paths. You can do research; you can teach; you can take care of patients; you can do public health; you can work for industry, and so I would encourage people to go into medicine. It is an honorable profession. It's very hard. It's very challenging but you'll never be bored.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Is there anything else you'd like to say before we close this up?

Vicki Fraser: I guess, I think that we are incredibly lucky here in St. Louis, that this is a community that I think is very nurturing of its young people and we have great schools, we have great support systems and, as a faculty member at Washington University, it's sometimes hard to recruit people from the coast to come to St. Louis until they get here. So I think this is an environment that allows people to be successful in their careers and to balance a family. So I'm really glad I came back to St. Louis. I'm really glad for what UMSL and St. Louis University and Washington University really do for St. Louis because this is a really great community.

Blanche Touhill: Thank you very much.