

An Interview with
Joanne Griffin

at the Historical Society of Missouri St. Louis
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Interviewed by Dr. Blanche M. Touhill
Transcribed by Valerie Leri and edited by
Josephine Sporleder



Oral History Program

The State Historical Society of Missouri

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PREACE

The interview was filmed using a Canon XH A1S A camera on a placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets []. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [“”] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

MAY 29, 2015

JOANNE GRIFFIN INTERVIEWED BY DR. BLANCHE M. TOUHILL

Blanche Touhill: Would you introduce yourself?

Joanne Griffin: Sure, my name is Joanne Sawhill Griffin and I live here in St. Louis, although I tend to tell people that I'm from New York and every once in a while I say "dawg" and then they realize I am from New York.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about your early life: where you were born; your parents; your grandparents; your cousins. How did you play as a young child? Did anybody in your family group say to you, "Joanne, you really have ability and you should think about what you want to do" or "you have a certain strength." Just talk about your youth.

Joanne Griffin: Well, I'm the only girl among all the cousins and so when I was born, I think I was celebrated for being the one girl. I pretty much had an idyllic childhood. My parents stayed together. We moved from New York to Syracuse to Rochester and I really had a chance with some great teachers each time we moved who were very supportive of me and reached out to me, coming from another place. And back then, in the '50s and '60s, people didn't move around a lot and so I was made to feel special which actually I was just different, but made to feel special which was really very nice. My parents didn't really have a lot of high expectations for me. My brother, whose name is Ray Sawhill III, had a lot of expectations built into his life because, being named after my grandfather and my father and being a boy, he was really pushed very hard. I accomplished a lot of things and each time I think I surprised my parents and my relatives because I was a girl and, "Wow, she did something great; isn't that wonderful?" And so it was nice not having expectations set for me, although I realized that I did very well at school and it seemed very easy to me. I could memorize very fast and I had the excellent teachers. My parents were really role models from a values point of view: honesty; taking care of people. They volunteered at Meals on Wheels, went to visit older people who had retired from the companies they worked for and really showed us by the way they lived their lives, that that was a good way to do things. We always made sure that if we made purchases they were wise purchases. I was never spanked as a child. Instead my mom would sit down and discuss with me why I did something wrong and

couldn't we talk about it. I think I would have preferred being spanked sometimes instead of having a discussion about it since I knew I was doing it wrong to start with. But when I went through grade school and then into high school, it was in the '60s and at that time, the boys really were the ones who were the stars in the class. So I was vice president of the student council. I was co-director of the one-act plays. I was always in a secondary role which was the top girl role but I just thought that was the way things were and at the time I thought I wanted to be an airline stewardess because that way I could travel the world and I thought that would really be great. It turns out that I was 5'2¾" ; you had to be 5'3" so that was one of my big disappointments, was I couldn't be a stewardess. It never occurred to me to be a pilot or to think of that because there just weren't any role models who were out there. But on the girl side, I could excel so I was captain of the cheerleaders and Future Teachers of America, I could be head of that because it was an all-girls group. So it was just the way things were and I was very surprised when I went to Smith, which was all women, that...

Blanche Touhill: Wait a minute. Don't go to Smith yet. When you were younger, did you play with your brother and your cousins?

Joanne Griffin: Sure. Well, we moved away so my cousins all lived down in New York. We used to go back for Easter and Christmas and holidays but I played with my brother and most of the kids in our neighborhood were younger than I was so I would play "teacher" so I would learn something at school and then I would come home and teach, or I would go to the library and take out a book and then I would read to them. And so I always was the "older" level person, so I guess that's being a leader but I think part of it was just I was taller and so that was it.

Blanche Touhill: Well, they listened to you though.

Joanne Griffin: They listened to me.

Blanche Touhill: And they thought you were learned, probably.

Joanne Griffin: Probably, I was a couple inches taller, so, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: That's right, and you could read and they couldn't.

Joanne Griffin: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: But when you played with your cousins and they were all boys and you were the only girl, did you trot along with them?

Joanne Griffin: Sure. Now, my cousins were older and so I was a younger kid trotting along with them but I could ride a bicycle and they could ride a bicycle they played softball so I could play softball. So we did play together. Then, of course, as you got older, they were stronger so playing tennis, they were much better than I was and so then it really...physical things really separated there.

Blanche Touhill: When you went to different schools, was it hard to fit in?

Joanne Griffin: No, my parents told me that it was really a wonderful opportunity and that I was special because we were doing this. So when we lived in New York, I was taking tap dance lessons and ballet lessons and music lessons and had lots of friends there, plus in grade school. Then we moved to Syracuse, and just by chance, I was ahead in tap dance and a couple of things and so I was able to fit in easily because also the New York schools were much tougher than they were in Syracuse so I already was ahead in my reading and arithmetic in the classes that you take as a child just because the schools I had gone to in New York had been so much more...and I went to a Montessori school in pre-school and then they didn't have that up in Syracuse where I lived. And then, moving from Syracuse to Rochester, I had already been moved once and had fit in easily and so I thought that that was just normal. Now, my dad only had two companies that he worked for in his lifetime. They were bought out multiple times so it was all different companies but we were moved because of his job and that just seemed normal to me, that we had moved before and we would move again.

Blanche Touhill: Were the children in the rooms, were they from Syracuse or Rochester and New York, did they move?

Joanne Griffin: I didn't know anybody else who moved. I was always the unusual person who had moved in but the teachers were very, very kind to me and introduced me to reading groups as something special and "isn't it great that we have someone unusual." Nowadays, I think kids move a lot more often and it's more normal but back then, I was an exotic species.

Blanche Touhill: Was your brother older or younger?

Joanne Griffin: My brother is four years younger than I am and he's absolutely brilliant. So I was very glad that he came after me in school because when the teachers would say to him he had to live up to Joanne, it was easy for him. So that worked out.

Blanche Touhill: Were you athletic? Yes, you were.

Joanne Griffin: Well, I was a cheerleader and so that was athletic but we didn't have girls' sports really like they have today and so, although we had gym class and of course I hated swimming because you got your hair wet and then that was a challenge, redoing your hair exactly right, but we didn't really have girls' sports. So if you say cheerleading is athletic, then I would say...

Blanche Touhill: Well, it is athletic and I grew up in a time when there weren't women's sports, well, either in grade school or high school and certainly not in college. So go on then, were you a good writer? You were good at English, no doubt.

Joanne Griffin: I was very good at math and very good at science.

Blanche Touhill: So you were unique in that way too.

Joanne Griffin: Yes. Now in grade school, of course, we didn't really have those kind of things but as you went into junior high and high school...I was very good at those and I read and still read voraciously and so my vocabulary was very good and my standardized testing was always very good but I'd always score higher in the math than I would score on the English side.

Blanche Touhill: Now, did you take the upper level math courses in high school?

Joanne Griffin: Yes, I did.

Blanche Touhill: Were you the only girl?

Joanne Griffin: I was one of three girls but we were divided into 24 different class sections and so I was in the top class section and that had girls in it and boys in it too. Then we were divided further by music and I was also in the band and orchestra because I played flute and piccolo and piano and guitar and a lot of different things.

Blanche Touhill: But doesn't music go with math?

Joanne Griffin: I think it really does, absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: So there were probably boys who were in the math and science that were in the orchestra as well?

Joanne Griffin: Right, mm-hmm, so it was a lot of the same kids that I went through multiple classes. So it was almost like brothers and sisters because it was the same kids all the time.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have male friends in high school?

Joanne Griffin: Yes, because they kept our group sort of separate from the rest of the groups because we did all of the advance placement, everything and so our little band of 20 kids or so were always in special classes. So those were my friends but by cheerleading, and then we would be on the bus with the teams going to the other high schools, you got to know kids who usually weren't in the accelerated classes. They were much more athletic and so it was just a different group. So I had friends across the whole spectrum.

Blanche Touhill: I know all high schools honor athletes. Did your schools honor academics? Did they give out a book award or did they announce who was the top of the class? Did they have an honor society?

Joanne Griffin: They had a National Honor Society so we had that and then at some of the assemblies, they would give out awards. I've been president of the Smith College Club here in town and we give out a book award to about a dozen schools each year and I have thought and thought, trying to come up with whether book awards were given out in high school because I think it's a good way for people to learn about different colleges and receive a book...an acknowledgement of their accomplishments but I don't remember awards. The types of things that I won were New York State Regence scholarships and things like that that were more...not specific to my school really.

Blanche Touhill: Explain what the Regions program was.

Joanne Griffin: You took testing and if you received a Regence award, it was a scholarship to a school that was a New York State school. And so as my parents took me to Smith crossing over the New York State line, he kissed goodbye that scholarship because I was going to school in Massachusetts. And then National Merit Award scholarships...

Blanche Touhill: You were National Merit?

Joanne Griffin: Yeah, and so those kind of awards but those were all at graduation, I think they mentioned those things. I don't think that we had many things otherwise.

Blanche Touhill: At one time in my life, I lived in New York City and I was finishing my dissertation and I had a license to teach in the New York City public schools and I marveled at the Regence scholarships and the Regence courses. I thought New York City had a very mixed school system. They

had really a curriculum for the very bright, for the middle and then for those who were not as smart. It was a remarkable school system and when I heard about the Regence, I just thought, I don't know who thought that up but it was a wonderful way to inspire kids to study so they could go, really free, to public higher education.

Joanne Griffin: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: It was a wonderful idea.

Joanne Griffin: And it was really sought after in our school and it was played up very big because we were a centralized school so we had kids who came from farms way, way far away by bus.

Blanche Touhill: And the opportunity was open to them?

Joanne Griffin: Right, exactly.

Blanche Touhill: That's wonderful. Well, talk about, how did you ever decide on Smith?

Joanne Griffin: My grandmother went to Smith and graduated in 1908, and my aunt went there also and my parents coming from New York City, of course, knew the "seven sisters" Ivy League, et cetera. Up in Penfield, people really didn't know it that much so Smith, that was a common name, like Jones so it wasn't really...

Blanche Touhill: [Inaudible 13:39]?

Joanne Griffin: Yeah, what kind of a...but my parents told us, both my brother and I, when we went to junior high, we had a talk about...because that's where they started splitting everybody off pretty much...that we could go to any college we wanted to that we could get into. So, of course, both of us picked the hardest places we could come up with. When my mom and dad checked into things and started realizing that the kind of marks we were getting, that we might get into schools like that, she went to work so that she could make sure that we had money because I don't think scholarships were as available back then. I'm not really sure.

Blanche Touhill: No, nor were federal loans, all loans or grants.

Joanne Griffin: Okay. And so they probably looked into that. My mom was very pragmatic and very logical in research. So she went to work to make sure that there would be enough money. My brother went off to Exeter pretty fast and I think he went in 7th grade or 8th grade, I think.

Blanche Touhill: Did you think about that at all?

Joanne Griffin: Well, my parents asked me if I wanted to go off to private school and the only private schools I knew were in...in Rochester, there were only two private schools and they were both for children who had problems. Then there were Catholic schools but we weren't Catholic. So I didn't really know what a private school was. Now, my brother was so smart that he never had homework and the principal called my parents in several times saying, "He's going to get into trouble; he's way too smart for us; we really can't handle that kind of an outlier person so you need to send him away to school," and he was a small kid and it was hard for my parents so they thought, no, it's really better to stay here instead of being away. Then they said, "Well, we're just going to skip in grades," and they didn't want him to be skipped because, for boys, athletics was a big deal. So he went away to school.

Blanche Touhill: And how did he like that?

Joanne Griffin: Mentally, he really enjoyed it. He had a mentor there and some counselors who were wonderful. He really missed being part of the family unit though. Our foursome was a very tight group and so that was hard for him but by the time he then went to Princeton, he was used to being away and you have to take care of getting your clothes cleaned and all of those kinds of things. It was just pretty shocking for him to go from a family where your mom did your wash and you were told to take your lunch money to school, into going to be on your own. But it was the right thing for him and he was glad he did it. It was just a big shock for him.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I know on the East Coast, it's so prevalent.

Joanne Griffin: It is, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: But I know in the Midwest, it really isn't...

Joanne Griffin: No.

Blanche Touhill: ...but there are a lot of private schools in the big cities in the Midwest and I understand there's a very fine private school in Minnesota that's secular, that has boarders and our friend that is the head of Country Day was involved...

Joanne Griffin: Right, Lisa Lyle, right, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: ...for a number of years.

Joanne Griffin: Well, I was already being elected to things and in plays and things.

Blanche Touhill: And you felt comfortable?

Joanne Griffin: Yeah, so I didn't see a reason to go away. My brother had difficulty the first few months and I thought, well, I'm not sure...now, they hadn't come to my parents while I was in junior high and so I wasn't sure I wanted to go to Smith because that would be following the family tradition and so my parents took me to Vassar and Wellesley and all the other places.

Blanche Touhill: But, you know, going back to the private schools, now that I think about it, were the private schools comparable to the boys' schools in the Northeast for women?

Joanne Griffin: Sure, Rosemary Hall, oh, sure.

Blanche Touhill: Name another one.

Joanne Griffin: Of course I had it in my brain a minute ago...Oprah's daughter goes there...Miss Porter's School.

Blanche Touhill: Were there any co-ed?

Joanne Griffin: At the time, there were not co-ed. Exeter is co-ed now but it wasn't co-ed when my brother went and a lot of them, just like MICDS, got together, a lot of them have joined together so now...I don't think Rosemary Hall exists anymore, just like Radcliffe or Pembroke, don't really exist anymore except as a school within the college, I think.

Blanche Touhill: Barnard...

Joanne Griffin: Or Barnard, right, exactly.

Blanche Touhill: But those are on the college level. I was really going back to, do the people on the East Coast send their sons alone or were there...I don't think there were many places for girls to go in that time.

Joanne Griffin: There weren't as many.

Blanche Touhill: Preparatory schools because, well, when you finished, you'd go to Wellesley or Radcliffe or one of the "seven sisters."

Joanne Griffin: Right, exactly.

Blanche Touhill: You know, it's an interesting topic that I never focused on until we started to have this conversation. That's really a great topic. I wonder if in England...they do have prep schools for girls, don't they...

Joanne Griffin: Right, right.

Blanche Touhill: ...and boarding schools for girls. I'm not sure, I think they can go as young as seven, when the little boys go but I had some friends and they sent the girl at 10. They felt she was more capable...

Joanne Griffin: That's 4th grade then, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: ...of going away at the age of 10 but it's very interesting, that education and then of course you have to ask yourself: what were they preparing them for?

Joanne Griffin: Right, sure, because a lot went to junior colleges that were finishing schools.

Blanche Touhill: Indeed. When you talk that your grandmother and your aunt went to Smith, what year did Smith open?

Joanne Griffin: 1875.

Blanche Touhill: So, really, your grandmother...

Joanne Griffin: These are tests on dates.

Blanche Touhill: I'm a historian so...but, they were there in the very early, early days.

Joanne Griffin: Well, my grandmother was German and her parents were German also. Her father came over from Germany and education was really valued even back then. So my mother's side of the family were all professors, one was a Greek and Latin professor at Dartmouth or at Harvard or MIT or they were doctors or financiers. So they were all very well educated. So it was assumed she would go to college.

Blanche Touhill: Did they come out of the Revolution of 1848?

Joanne Griffin: No, they were from Germany. Her dad was born in 1875, I think...it might be 1877.

Blanche Touhill: Were they professors and educated in Germany?

Joanne Griffin: They were educated in Germany, that was her mother's side but her father's side were over here and they were early, the Skinner's were

early and so they were actually supportive of England and so during the American Revolutionary War they went up to Canada.

Blanche Touhill: Did they come back?

Joanne Griffin: And they came back, uh-huh, and lived in Boston, uh-huh.

Blanche Touhill: And did they come back to the same neighborhood from whence they went?

Joanne Griffin: I think so because they were all from Boston and I have some ads about my great great grandfather who was an ophthalmologist and also a graduate degree from MIT.

Blanche Touhill: So they were professional people on both sides?

Joanne Griffin: So they were all...yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Early.

Joanne Griffin: Mm-hmm, so it was just assumed you would be well educated and of course you would read. So books were a big gift item.

Blanche Touhill: Do you speak German?

Joanne Griffin: I don't speak German at all.

Blanche Touhill: Have you been to Germany?

Joanne Griffin: I haven't been to Germany yet but I do a lot of family genealogy and I know my family is from Gelnhausen and also Frankfurt and so I've been actually working with a genealogist over there because I want, when I go, to be as prepared as I can be to do my family genealogy work over there.

Blanche Touhill: Wonderful.

Joanne Griffin: Yeah. So I'm looking forward to that. My father's side is from Northern Ireland so I was waiting until that was a little bit safer, to go over there and look. So I think it's safe now, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: I think you always have to be careful when you're in a strange place and there's always somebody but I think you're safe.

Joanne Griffin: Mm-hmm, I think so.

Blanche Touhill: So, go on. So you chose Smith. In those days did you go around and visit colleges?

Joanne Griffin: I did. My dad and mom took me around to all the colleges and my mom made sure that I had shoes that matched my purse and I wore gloves for the interviews too to go in but I knew to take my...

Blanche Touhill: Did you have a hat?

Joanne Griffin: I didn't have a hat. My mom had a hat though and we went completely dressed up. My dad had a suit on and everything for the interviews and I was well prepared. My mom and dad made sure, they went through questions with me beforehand and they took me to schools I didn't want to go to as much sort of preparing me for interviews, which I thought was very good.

Blanche Touhill: Of course, and where...

Joanne Griffin: So Skidmore we went to, for example, which I liked; Russell Sage which, I'm not sure exists anymore but it was in Troy, New York, around there, and then I interviewed at Barnard and Radcliffe, Wellesley, Vassar and Smith...

Blanche Touhill: But you chose Smith.

Joanne Griffin: I chose Smith. It's an absolutely beautiful campus. I went there on a day when it was spectacular and everybody I met there was wonderful and they have a house system where you have your dining room in the house. So it wasn't a sorority but it was all four classes and it was really very lovely.

Blanche Touhill: How many girls were in the house?

Joanne Griffin: Depending on the size of the house, it could be everything from 15 up to maybe 60 or so, and so I applied Early Decision and I got in so that sort of made that easy... for that.

Blanche Touhill: Somebody told me once that when you get into one of those houses, sometimes it's hard to meet people from the other houses.

Joanne Griffin: It is but it depends on your major too, so you meet people through your major but those are all then going to be the same class, you know, juniors or seniors, whereas it was nice in the house; you always had freshmen all the way up. But now they've centralized some of the dining just from a

cost point of view. So, sadly, it's more Continental breakfast in the morning.

Blanche Touhill: And you had somebody to cook the food and serve the food?

Joanne Griffin: We did, uh-huh, and we had maids also and so you put your laundry out for the maids. You had to help once a month in bringing out some food to the table. But Thursday nights were white tablecloths and candlelight and so it had sort of an element of finishing too and many, many girls who were there were from private schools and that was a real surprise to me.

Blanche Touhill: So they had come out of the private schools?

Joanne Griffin: They had come out of the private school system.

Blanche Touhill: And how did they react to you?

Joanne Griffin: In many cases, their skills were better than mine and I thought I went to a good high school and had done well in advanced placement courses but I also met some very, very wealthy women too and that was the bigger surprise because I thought I spoke French fairly well, having taken classes, been to France, whatever, and I met girls who had second homes in France or who went there for vacation and it was a surprise to me. For Thanksgiving or Spring break, I was going home to see my parents. Well, they were going to the Caribbean. It was just very different. So the difference in wealth was...I came home the first time and I remember asking my dad in the car coming back from the airport, he must not have told me about my trust fund, right, because everybody had a trust fund and he almost drove off the road..."Trust fund?" And so it was learning a whole new vocabulary and it was a surprise. The first year was very hard for me because people were better at school than I was and I had been a star in music and in athletics, cheerleading, and plays and everything and to go there and everybody else was too, it really raised the bar of what the competition was. And one day I remember going to a class and I thought the class started at 8:00 o'clock and it really started at 7:40 so I came in late, I realized I was late, I sat in the back of the room and at the time, I didn't want to ask the professor, full professor, what the assignment was which he had given out in the beginning of class and I asked someone else and they deliberately gave me the wrong assignment which I didn't realize until the next week when I brought my assignment in, it was wrong. I went back to the girl and I said, "Why did you give me the wrong assignment?" and she said, "Well, they're grading on a curve. Why would I give you the right assignment?" and I was like, wow, this is tough here because I had come from that small group who had gone together since all of high school. When I told my parents, they were like,

“Well, was she from New York City?” and I said, “Well, yes,” and they said, “You have to understand, New York is a tough place. Penfield was a nice, sweet place and the world isn’t always going to be really nice” and when I was getting an MBA later on, that kind of lesson was really very helpful to me. But it was a surprise that not everybody was your best friend like they had been.

Blanche Touhill: Going to college, the first semester, I think is a very shocking experience.

Joanne Griffin: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: But you really went into the big time.

Joanne Griffin: Mm-hmm, it was a big change for me.

Blanche Touhill: And the people who were there, they knew what the big time was, the New York big time.

Joanne Griffin: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: I lived in New York and I taught school in New York.

Joanne Griffin: So you know.

Blanche Touhill: And I do know but they have many strong points too. They’re just...it’s a fast track.

Joanne Griffin: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: It’s interesting, but you found that they accepted you?

Joanne Griffin: Well, I ended up with straight A’s so I...I mean, I knew I could do the work; it was just really being dropped into the deep end...

Blanche Touhill: ...and told to swim.

Joanne Griffin: ...told to swim.

Blanche Touhill: You were there and they knew you could do it.

Joanne Griffin: Right. I wasn’t ever concerned that I couldn’t do it. It was just totally different.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and the social arrangements, they looked upon you as a competitor in the future as well.

Joanne Griffin: Absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: And they wanted to be the valedictorian.

Joanne Griffin: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Those two points make a big difference.

Joanne Griffin: Right.

Blanche Touhill: What did you learn at Smith?

Joanne Griffin: I learned a huge amount of self-confidence. Because only women were there, it was really a chance then to excel and be encouraged to excel. It wasn't, well, the president of the student council always has to be a boy so you can't even run for it; it was, now you can run for it. And so it was really an awakening and that I could achieve anything I wanted to. Now, my parents had always been very supportive of me and anything I wanted to do but this was really making decisions on my own about what I wanted to do.

Blanche Touhill: What did you decide?

Joanne Griffin: I discovered that I had to prioritize well. I couldn't be in as many music things as I liked because I, truthfully, wasn't really that talented in music. I worked hard at it and I practiced a lot but I wasn't talented at music, I could see that, and some of the girls were there because they were extremely talented at music and once I realized that...although it hurt my feelings...it was, well, then I'll concentrate more on the things that I'm good at.

Blanche Touhill: And what were you good at?

Joanne Griffin: I was good at academics; I was good at math and science, and I took a lot of math and science classes. I didn't think about becoming a scientist or a mathematician because I just didn't see role models in that area or what I would do with that and so I decided I would be a teacher and I would be a French teacher. I had had a very good French teacher in high school and I thought being a French teacher would be good because I'd get the summers off, it would be a lot of travel, this sounded like a great thing. And so I decided I would go junior year abroad so you had to take art

classes and French classes to go to France. We only had France, England and I think Switzerland, maybe Germany. Now you can go to a hundred different countries but then you couldn't. And so I took that and I discovered I loved art history too and that was really interesting. So I did junior year abroad but then I practice taught and I discovered I really didn't like children so that was a problem.

Blanche Touhill: Where did you go in France?

Joanne Griffin: I was in Paris but I went to tour in the summer of my high school and so while I was over in tour, that's where I really got the bug of becoming a French teacher type of person and then I was down in Marseilles and Aix-en-Provence for the pre-class before going up to Paris. Then I quit halfway through and came back to the States.

Blanche Touhill: How did you find Paris to live in as a student?

Joanne Griffin: I only lived there a short time before I quit and came back. I was very disappointed in the whole program. The person who had taken everybody over for 40 years who had never written anything down, had a heart attack just before I was supposed to go. And so they sent an American woman who was a French teacher...not a French person...and nothing was written down. Nowadays everything is so different. So the French were incensed that it wasn't a French person coming over. They weren't much help to her. Things were extremely disorganized and I was just very unhappy and it just wasn't working out the way I wanted.

Blanche Touhill: Did you see the difference between the South of France and Paris?

Joanne Griffin: Yes, definitely and I love the South of France and I've gone back many, many times now because I love Provence and (inaudible?) and all the places down there that are just sunshine and wonderful.

Blanche Touhill: How was Marseilles? I've never been to Marseilles.

Joanne Griffin: You have a lot of migrants coming over from Africa and also it's a big headquarters for the trains going to Paris. So from all around there, you have lots of people...

Blanche Touhill: It's very industrial.

Joanne Griffin: Very industrial, a lot of crime, not really a very...in my opinion...safe place.

Blanche Touhill: But Provence...

Joanne Griffin: But Provence and Aix-en-Provence is totally different, absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: I was always pleasantly surprised by the Roman ruins.

Joanne Griffin: Oh, I loved going to ruins. I'd still like to go to see ruins today.

Blanche Touhill: But Provence had them.

Joanne Griffin: Oh, sure, all the aqueducts and everything, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: It's just mind-boggling. So you come back and you take the January semester back at...

Joanne Griffin: No because I didn't realize that the semesters were different in France than they were at Smith and so I came back after the semester had started and you could only transfer in, so I also had a boyfriend and so what I decided to do was get married. So I got married and then had a semester off where I took some classes over at University of Massachusetts.

Blanche Touhill: At Amherst?

Joanne Griffin: At Amherst, uh-huh, and then went to school the summer and then was caught up by the time the fall came.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, wonderful. So you went back to Smith?

Joanne Griffin: So I went back to Smith, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And did you live in the house?

Joanne Griffin: No, married girls would contaminate other girls so I was not allowed to live there. Now, my husband had already graduated and his dad had a stroke and so he went home to run the family business. So I was up there alone with my two dogs and two cats in a condo and found that basically working hard was what I was going to do since I was now by myself. So that was where I started getting all my straight A's.

Blanche Touhill: And then what was your major?

Joanne Griffin: I ended up majoring in art history. The French Department was not very happy with me when I came back. So I found art early, in my sophomore

year and then decided to be an art history major. So I was a French minor. We really didn't have computers then. I really should have been a math or science major. I took a lot of science classes: biology and horticulture and all sorts of science and math classes. I would have enjoyed being a research person. I can blame anybody I want, but I just didn't see it as an option.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I don't think the world was there. So you graduated.

Joanne Griffin: I graduated, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And then what happened?

Joanne Griffin: I moved back to Rochester, which was where my husband was.

Blanche Touhill: Did you meet him in high school?

Joanne Griffin: I knew him in high school because he was older. He went to the same high school I went to but he went to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and that was where I met him, up there, because I was calling people I knew kind of thing. He didn't think I should work. I decided I would work to get a discount at a department store for Christmas.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, of course.

Joanne Griffin: That made a lot of sense to me. And so I went to apply at McCurdy's. They offered me a job in the management training class and I went over to Sibley's which was across the street so that I had gotten this offer; could I have a better offer and they offered me more money. So I went to Sibley's. I'd learned to negotiate also at Smith. So I worked in retail and I kept getting promoted. Most people in retail either didn't have a college education or hadn't been well schooled in a lot of things. So I got promoted very fast, although promotion really was just a job change title and maybe twenty-five cents an hour so it wasn't a huge amount but I thought, wow, I was moving up the ladder but now I'm now an executive trainee instead of a junior executive trainee. One day Julia Childs came and she was promoting a book and they had a luncheon for her and because I had gone to Smith, they invited me to the luncheon and at the lunch, she turned to me and she said, "What are you doing here?" and I was like, "Well, I'm doing great. I'm promoted all the time," and she said, "Absolutely not. You should do something...use your brain. Do something more," and I thought, well, this lady doesn't even know me. How could she say that? And I sort of tucked it in the back of my mind and then maybe three or four months later, a very nice man who was a senior

manager there was talking to me and he said, "What are you going to do?" and I said, "Oh, I'm going to get promoted. I'll be a buyer and a senior buyer, DMM," and he said, "Well, look around. Are there any women who have those jobs?" and I said, "Well, Mrs. Lindsay does." It was Sibley, Lindsay & Kirk and I said, "Mrs. Lindsay does," and he said, "Well, where's her office?" and I said, "Well, it's in the lower level," the basement and he said, "What's her responsibility?"; "Well, she picks out the shopping bag design," and that was, of course, because her family owned the company and there were no other women. Then it really reminded me of Julia Childs and how she had said something. So I looked around and realized, wow, it was all men. What were the chances I would be the only female who would move ahead? Nowadays, retail is heavily female but it wasn't back then. So I decided I would apply for a job. So I went looking for jobs and I was either over qualified or under qualified at every job I applied for. I remember going to Kodak and applying and they told me I was over qualified for the job, under qualified because mostly it was engineers there, and I didn't even make it to the front door. I went to the bathroom and just cried my eyes out. I just couldn't figure out a way to get to move forward. So I decided I would get an MBA and so University of Rochester was the best school so I thought I would apply at the University of Rochester. Well, they felt I hadn't had enough business classes because, of course, it was liberal arts at Smith. So I went over to talk with them and I don't think I had taken...whatever the graduate...the test is for lawyers and there's one for MBA's, I think, too, which I hadn't taken at Smith because they hadn't offered it. And I went over and talked to them and they said, "No, you really can't apply. You don't have enough of a background," and I went back home and I thought, I've already exhausted everything else. I've got to get the MBA. So I went back and it was an executive MBA that I was looking at doing because I was working at the time. So I went there and I told them, "I'm never leaving this room until the...for an application here...until you let me in the class and I'm not leaving" and I went every single day and I would just...I called in sick at work and at that time, they let me in. So, I was in the executive MBA...

Blanche Touhill: How many days did it take?

Joanne Griffin: It only took four days so I didn't have to do a whole week.

Blanche Touhill: So you went and sat in the office?

Joanne Griffin: Mm-hmm, and I refused to leave but I realized, once I was accepted though, I was the one white female in the whole class. There was one black female and one Japanese female.

Blanche Touhill: Out of how many people?

Joanne Griffin: I'm going to say 75 people maybe.

Blanche Touhill: And the others were white males?

Joanne Griffin: We had one black male also who ended up as the mayor of Rochester. But otherwise, everybody else was a white male.

Blanche Touhill: What year was this?

Joanne Griffin: It was '76, I guess, when I was applying. So I think I got in, in part, because...not because I was sitting there but they needed a white female and if I was going to be this dogged about it, maybe they would let me in.

Blanche Touhill: They'd either have to call the police eventually...

Joanne Griffin: Yeah, exactly.

Blanche Touhill: ...or they would have to let you in.

Joanne Griffin: ...or they'd let me in. They had a party the night before, which was a Thursday night and class was on Friday and I went to the party not knowing who was in the class and both the women didn't go that night just due to family reasons or what, and I went to U of R, to the executive dining room and I look around and everybody was a man and I thought, oh, my God, I can't believe I wanted to get into this. This is going to be really tough. Then they brought the cigars out and passed out the cigars and I thought, this really is going to be really, really tough for me. So I was very pleased Friday morning to show up and find two other women in the class and the Japanese woman was married to an Estonian man who was...actually, it was a perfect marriage for them. She was much more quiet and he was the man of the family kind of thing. But she didn't want to get any degree more than his degree so she already had an engineering undergraduate, a Master's in computer science, a Master's in electrical engineering, an aeronautical engineering degree but she didn't get anything more than a Master's because that's what her husband had had. So she just kept doing that. Well, luckily she turned out to be my best friend because most of the professors were from University of Chicago and so math was...it wasn't a case study like Harvard was; everything instead was mathematics-oriented. So she knew how to do everything. So that was really wonderful. I made sure she was in my study group so that we could do that.

Blanche Touhill: But you were talented as well.

Joanne Griffin: I was talented but she was, I mean, you know...she was extraordinary. And so it was two of the most difficult...

Blanche Touhill: And how was the other woman?

Joanne Griffin: She dropped out pretty fast of that and I think it just didn't work out.

Blanche Touhill: She didn't smoke cigars.

Joanne Griffin: No, she didn't smoke cigars. But it was two very extremely difficult years and the amount of homework was massive.

Blanche Touhill: And you were still working?

Joanne Griffin: I was still working and at Sibley's they were not trying very hard to help me because they knew I was getting the degree to leave. So they would call meetings late and so it was very, very difficult at work. And also, I had to work so hard and my husband owned restaurants and bars so to him, coming home at 2:00 in the morning was 5:00 o'clock at night. So he felt I should make dinner because it was really 5:00 o'clock at night. Well, meanwhile, I had a lot of homework to do and I wasn't going to get up at 2:00 in the morning as his mother had done with his father when his father owned the businesses and make everything and his mother, of course, didn't work too, which was different. So we discovered that we had different goals in life and he wanted me to stay home, go to the country club, play golf, play bridge. All of those things are wonderful, and by the way, I love all those things but I really wanted to get the degree. And so, in addition, I got separated and divorced during this time and my mother had a heart attack and died. So it was really very difficult going through everything for that.

Blanche Touhill: But it was the right thing to do.

Joanne Griffin: It was the right thing to do and I met a person who worked at Xerox who introduced me to someone and I went over and interviewed two different places at Xerox...

Blanche Touhill: When you graduated?

Joanne Griffin: When I graduated. And so, one of the places to interview was in a buying capacity and I was a buyer in retail but there was really no upward mobility in that but they offered more money for that. And the other was

in a different area but there was more upward mobility. So I picked that area and then I got there, I was there two days, they reorganized and everything totally changed. So it was a real surprise that, no matter how hard you pick out, you still have to play the hand that you're dealt. But the MBA class was...I remember one time one of the study groups stole a test so they knew the answers beforehand. We went through the exam and then another study group found out because someone bragged in that study group and they went to the professor to complain and thought this study group that stole the test should have to be...all receive zeros or something. And the professor came in and he said, "I'm going to teach you all a lesson," he said, "what the real life is like out there." He said, "Let's say you had a great idea and you wanted to patent it but someone else patented it ahead of you. Well, too bad. That's just the way life is. These people stole the test. Too bad, you all, it was on a grade and that"...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, see, I think there's a difference between...

Joanne Griffin: And that was a real surprise but the Smith thing, it sort of prepared me for it but it was still an awakening. It was just too bad, the real world is like that.

Blanche Touhill: What a terrible lesson that teaches.

Joanne Griffin: You remember it though for years, not a good lesson but you remember it for years, definitely. So then I started at Xerox and I was called an astronaut at Xerox which was or high flyers. So it was for people who were given special education down in Leesburg, so every year I was sent to Leesburg for additional...

Blanche Touhill: Virginia?

Joanne Griffin: Virginia, where they had a huge campus down there.

Blanche Touhill: And you met people from the company all over?

Joanne Griffin: All over the world, yeah, so that was really very interesting and every year I was moved to a different division of Xerox. So when I came here...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful!

Joanne Griffin: ...yeah, so it was wonderful so I worked in all different areas and then, coming to St. Louis, I was on my way to Los Angeles. So this was a stop along the way in this program. Then they closed down a lot of the offices out in California because all the patents were expiring, the Japanese

companies...where copiers were coming up...so all of a sudden I was in St. Louis with no place to go and they were laying people off on the East Coast so I couldn't go back. So I came to St. Louis, never having been here, thinking it was a short time.

Blanche Touhill: So you [inaudible 46:19]?

Joanne Griffin: Yeah, so I ended up moving to Enterprise.

Blanche Touhill: Now, how did you get to Enterprise?

Joanne Griffin: I met Peter here and we started as friends because I thought, I'm moving to California, but we ended up getting married and he was a banker with Commerce Bank and I was at Xerox and decided I would take one year and each quarter I would look for something different because I couldn't move up. It was closed on both sides and I had been used to this very rapid movement with good pay increases. So I would take one quarter of the year and I would look at starting my own business, buying a business, going to work for another big company, going to work for a small company, and at the end of a quarter, if I couldn't make a decision, I'd go onto the next topic and I would look at that and at the end of the year, I would make a decision no matter what. But I couldn't just hang on. That just wasn't my plan, to do that. So, at the time, I think 7-Up or one of the companies here in town had laid off a lot of people and given them a lot of money. You couldn't find a business to buy because a lot of people had a lot of money who were buying up small companies. I was always called by a lot of headhunters because I was in their computer for female, IVY League, successful in more than one company, more than one part of the country, MBA, et cetera. So I interviewed out at Apple, Kentucky Fried Chicken, PepsiCo, a whole bunch of different companies and I really didn't find a company that wasn't picking me for, "Let's have a female and now we have a female at this level" and it really wouldn't have responsibility. It would be a female at that level and "we could point to her," and I really didn't want a job that wasn't a job. And at Xerox, I knew everybody because I had worked my way around, all the way up in all the divisions so I could get things done because I could call somebody. Well, coming in from the outside with no power and no responsibility, being put into a job that you don't know anybody to get things done, in my opinion would have been a recipe for failure and I didn't really want to do that. So I was lamenting to Peter on the phone one day: "This isn't working well. I can't find anything" and Doug Albrecht's wife walked by, Anne Albrecht, and he said, "Oh, what about Enterprise Rent-a-Car" and just because she walked by, it triggered that in his mind and he said, "They have a venture capital group and maybe you'd like doing that"

because I was thinking I might want to run my own company. So I said, "Well, Rent-a-Car, eh, I don't think I'd really like renting cars," and he said, "No, no, they've got this venture capital. I'll talk to Anne, she'll talk to her husband, we'll go interview. You should go interview." So I didn't really want to do that but I thought, he's been nice enough to go with me to all of these interviews, I'll at least do that. And so, she talked to her husband who also said, "I don't see a point in interviewing her but, okay, I'll interview her because you said so." So I went in and I talked with Doug and he said, "Well, what do you want to do?" Now, of course, I'm thinking, I don't want a job here. It doesn't really matter. So I was probably a little bit more strong than I would normally be in an interview. And so I said, "I want to run a company on someone else's money," it made sense to me, and he said, "Well, we just bought a candy company. Would you like to run a candy company?" and I said, "Well, I know a lot about candy. I was a buyer. I know chocolate viscosities, et cetera." Now, technically, I'd never really been a buyer in the candy department. I was in the stationary department but it was next door to the candy department so I sort of knew...and viscosity was the one word I knew about chocolate. We got along and he said, "Well, let me think about it" and et cetera, and I said, "Well, I'm going to Colorado to work for a few days and then I'll be back and I'll call you then." He said fine and so I went to Colorado and I thought...it was just, part of my job was around the Midwest, and I said, well, I've looked everywhere else. I'm in the last quarter of the year. I know I want to make a decision. If they pay me on commission, I know I'll do well and so I called him up and I said, "I'll take the job" and he said, "Well, I didn't offer it to you." So we talked it through and I said, "Why don't we just try it for six months. If it works out, I'll stay. If it doesn't work out, you can let me go; no harm; no foul, and we'll go with that." And he said, "Why not?" So I got hired for 40% less money than I was making, which Peter said, "Now, aren't you supposed to go to more money? Isn't that the concept here?" But it worked out really well. So I started out as a national sales manager for the candy company.

Blanche Touhill: And you ended up...

Joanne Griffin: Group vice president there at the Capital Group so I had all the companies except the golf course. He had that one. Doug ran the golf course. But I had all the different companies there so I had vice presidents who worked for me for all those companies. Then I got a call to...or he got a call asking me to come over to talk to them, they were starting an 800 number center at Enterprise and so I went over and talked to them and they said, "Well, we thought you might be good for this job, to get it started because you're really very technical, you worked

for IBM,” and I said, “No, I worked for Xerox and I can press “start,” “print. I’m not really a technical person,” and they said, “Well, we think you would do good at it anyway.” So I went over and started their 800 number center. They had bought the number and they had a secretary and a couple people that built that. So, within six months, I think we were 800 or 1000 people or something. It was just massive growth and it was because Enterprise was so good with customer service locally that people said, “Oh, well, I want to rent from you when I go someplace else. Do you have an 800 number I can call and I can rent a car in that place because I don’t know the address or the phone number in Wyoming” or something. So it was really...I had never been in a job where the business just came over the transom. I mean, it was just like flooding in and we put in a new phone system and the first report said, 20,000 calls not answered this month and we’re like, “How can that be? That’s 1000 a day. How can that possibly...it has to be wrong,” but it wasn’t so we scaled up dramatically to answer calls but it was really amazing, the quality of people that you got at \$8.75 an hour. They didn’t know the difference between a city or a state so we had to give them maps on their desk and just a lot of things.

Blanche Touhill: So you had to train them and you had to...

Joanne Griffin: We had a huge amount of training...
Blanche Touhill: ...and equipment...

Joanne Griffin: ...computer knowledge.

Blanche Touhill: ...and buildings.

Joanne Griffin: Yeah, it was just...

Blanche Touhill: How exciting!

Joanne Griffin: It was exciting and it was a whole...800 numbers were new back then and that was a whole new exciting thing because it didn’t matter in phone technology what the technology was back then. It was only what it was today and future. So moving in, I didn’t lose anything because it wasn’t like French where you built up from the French verbs to sentences; it was, you start today and go forward. So it was really wonderful and I had great people working with me and so then I got promoted to manage that and some other departments and then some more departments.

Blanche Touhill: And you ended up as a vice president?

Joanne Griffin: Right, so then I was vice president of administration so I had the behind the scenes thing; I didn’t have the revenue side of the business.

Blanche Touhill: Let me change the topic for just a minute. Would you talk about, if you had been born 50 years earlier, what would your life be like?

Joanne Griffin: Well, I think 50 years earlier, I would have been more like my grandmother and so I probably would have been...

Blanche Touhill: You went to college, no doubt.

Joanne Griffin: I would have gone to college because she went to college and she was a teacher. I probably would have been a teacher also.

Blanche Touhill: Was she a teacher when she got married?

Joanne Griffin: She was a teacher when she got married, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Did she keep teaching?

Joanne Griffin: No, she didn't. She stayed home then and then she had three children. So I think I probably would have had the same push for being educated that my mother did and my parents did. So I think it would have been similar. The clothing would have been a lot different, of course, but I probably wouldn't have had the chances that I've had now to change companies, to try new things. Technology didn't exist. And being born in 1900, I would have gone through the Depression and that affected my parents hugely and I think I'm still the product of children of the Depression. I think that would have been a major part of who I was also like it was with my parents.

Blanche Touhill: Do you want to talk about any award or awards you've received that mean something very particular for you?

Joanne Griffin: I think probably one of the awards that meant a lot to me was one of the first awards I won which was a YWCA Women of Achievement Award. That award, I really liked because the celebration was so good. I met a lot of people who also were then members of the International Women's Forum there.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about the International Women's Forum.

Joanne Griffin: Well, the International Women's Forum was wonderful because I didn't know it existed and sometimes you can't stretch for something if you don't know it existed. Marilyn Mann took me to lunch one day and told me about it and I thought, oh, these sound like exactly the women I would like to know and I'd like to meet. The first meeting and the dinner,

the “Dine-Around” was outstanding and some of my best friends have come from there. I haven’t met any mentors but I’ve met a huge number of people who were role models for me and I think with my mom dying early and my aunt dying early and my grandmother dying early, having role models of women who have the kind of values that were important to me was what the International Women’s Forum meant.

Blanche Touhill: We just have a few more minutes. Do you want to mention anything specific?

Joanne Griffin: Well, I think I mentioned Peter earlier, in being key to me going over to Enterprise but I’d like to just say how supportive he was always and that was really what I was looking for, was someone who could allow me to be a star and be happy for me and not be competitive and a lot of people I dated were always very competitive. He was self-secure in his own being and that was very entrancing to me when I met him and he’s helped me really throughout my life.

Blanche Touhill: It’s interesting to compare your first husband to your second because your first husband was a traditional man...

Joanne Griffin: Absolutely, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And your current husband wants you to go as far as you want to go.

Joanne Griffin: Right, he’s a 21st century man.

Blanche Touhill: He is a 21st century man. What made him different?

Joanne Griffin: I think that getting married at an older age, he knew who he was and I knew who I was and I think when I got married when I was just turning 20, I thought I wanted a house and a garden and stay home and belong to the country club and, as I became more successful at work, I realized that wasn’t for me and I think if Peter and I had met back then, we might not have been as compatible but I think that, as you get older and self-sufficient and you know what’s important to you, I think that that made a difference.

Blanche Touhill: So you changed too.

Joanne Griffin: Yeah. I felt bad that I probably portrayed myself to my first husband differently from what I was, really, but I didn’t know who I was at that age. And he ended up marrying a woman and having three children and having a house and country club and that was what he wanted. I got

married too early. He's a wonderful person. It's just, we had different goals in life.

Blanche Touhill: Is there anything else you want to say?

Joanne Griffin: I just would also like to mention, I do a lot of work on my family genealogy and I'm trying to find my father's family which is Sawhill, S-a-w-h-i-l-l. It's a made up name and it was from Alexander Sawhill came over from Northern Ireland and every Sawhill in the world is related to him because it's a made up name. However, we don't know what the name was beforehand and so if there are any Sawhill's who ever view this, I would really like you to contact me because I'm just trying to find where we came from and sometime between 1789 and the beginning of history, what was the family name. So, thanks.

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much. It's been wonderful to talk and I really want to give you credit for arranging for all these 70 International Women's Forum ladies coming in and giving their interviews because you were the one that organized it.

Joanne Griffin: Well, when I talk about role models, you've always been one of mine so thank you so much. It's just been such a pleasure to get to be here with you.

Blanche Touhill: Thank you very much.

Joanne Griffin: Thanks.

