

An Interview with
Louise Losos

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
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Oral History Program

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PREFACE

The interview was taped 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.

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

MAY 13, 2016

LOUISE LOSOS INTERVIEWED BY BLANCHE TOUHILL

Blanche Touhill: Would you introduce yourself.

Louise Losos: My name is Louise Losos.

Blanche Touhill: And Louise, would you talk about your childhood: who in your family encouraged you to be what you wanted to be and then how did you play? Did you play with boys? Did you play with your sisters? Just talk about your siblings, your cousins, talk about anything about your childhood and what it was like.

Louise Losos: I'm the youngest of four siblings. I have an older brother who is six years older, a sister five years older and then one who is two years older than I am, my sister, Carol, and so she and I were closest. I grew up in suburban St. Louis and had a tremendous amount of freedom. We walked to and from elementary school and so you got to know the neighborhood that way. But the afternoons during the school year were pretty free and so I liked to explore. I was often a bit of a loner and so I would get on my bike and explore the neighborhood. There was a local church nearby that was just gorgeous and I was in my head a lot with imagination. There weren't a lot of neighbors with children. There was one across the street and some nearby. They were a little younger than I was but in the summertime I would play with them, both boys and girls. I don't remember playing with my sister a whole lot. I'm sure we did but I don't recall it necessarily. When it became time for Little League, I played a lot of sports.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness.

Louise Losos: Yes. So I was born in '68 so I was the early advent of...well, actually, when I was little, I played on boys' teams so when I was seven, I played on my cousin's soccer team, played baseball until later, softball came along. I don't know that I ever played organized softball until high school. I played

baseball and soccer growing up and then in high school, I played sports year-round. So that was the organized activities. When I was little, in elementary school time, it wasn't the kind of organized activities they have nowadays where things are very much scheduled. It was, you'd play until it got dark and you came home for dinner and in the summer, you would wake up, go out and play and then come home for lunch, come home for dinner. You read about those kind of things. It was mostly unstructured but Little League was structured. At one point...I'm Jewish...but had played on the middle school Catholic basketball team, which was interesting. Influences growing up: my siblings were very, very successful in high school, in college and so that sort of set a bar of expectation in my own mind. The biggest encourager was my mom. She always made it very clear that we could do or be really anything we wanted to be. She, for most of my childhood, did not have a formal job. She was an elementary teacher until my brother, Jonathan, was born and then she was a stay-at-home mom except that she wasn't really a stay-at-home mom. She was a volunteer. She was my older sister's Girl Scout troop leader and one time I asked her why she wasn't mine. It's because we had four Girl Scout troop leaders, but she very quickly rose in the volunteer organization she was in to be in a leadership position. So she was an example of someone who truly made a difference in the community. My grandmother died...her mother...when I was 10, I believe, 10 going on 11 and I had always heard stories when I was even older. My mom's father died when my mom was nine months old and so my grandmother in the early 1930's, in the height of the Depression, had to go to work and raise three children who all succeeded in high school with the college on scholarship at Wash U and so we had very strong female role models growing up. So there was never any kind of insinuation that we couldn't be whatever we wanted to be. My father, he just expected us to be successful. It wasn't quite the same thing. My mom is such a star and my dad, he appreciated and loved it. It never bothered him that my mom often outshone him in the public arena even though in the private arena, there was no question that they were equal, because my dad is brilliant, intellectually as well as in business. So, there was just the expectation that was set at the beginning, that whatever we chose to do we could do.

Blanche Touhill: Did your sisters influence you?

- Louise Losos: They did. My older siblings were leaders in the schools as well as my brother and so they set a standard that I tried to live up to, very high standard.
- Blanche Touhill: I know that they made trips, particularly to areas that were filled with nature.
- Louise Losos: Well, so, yes, by and large. I mean, my father has two abiding interests: history and the environment, animals. So trips would be taken that would fit one of those two categories. The story was, early on, my mom told my dad...it might have been before they had their first child...that they had to take a trip then, like, to South America because once they had children, they would stop traveling, which was deeply untrue. They have traveled my whole life. When we reached a certain age, they would take us. So when I was in 5th grade, we went to Egypt and so that was the historical part of it. Then when I was in 6th grade, we went to Sri Lanka which hit the animal side of it. So, if you look at the four of us, my mom has been in education, I would say, her entire adult life. She was a teacher in a classroom but she never really left teaching, be it as a Girl Scout troop leader or when she led Leadership St. Louis and Focus St. Louis. That was about teaching adults. So the four of us, in many ways, are the combination of those two. My brother is a professor of biology so he teaches on animals. My sister, Carol, she was an art history major and she worked as a museum educator and now is a director of an educational program. So, I studied history in college but I became a social studies teacher. So we are very much the amalgamation of my parents and all of us love to travel. My brother loves the animals. I love more the old world historical aspects of it. So, yes, we had the experiential education. My mom was a big believer in learning by travel, that travel was educational itself and so that those were experiences that you could never replace, and while, yes, she took us out of school, she didn't do it to go lay on a beach, not that there's anything inherently wrong in that. They did it because it was a once-in-a-lifetime type experience.
- Blanche Touhill: When you went to grade school, were you a leader in grade school?
- Louise Losos: That is a little hard to say. I think so. I was on the safety patrol in 6th grade.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes. So you were a crossing guard?

Louise Losos: Not on the main streets. It was, like, at the buses.

Blanche Touhill: So you helped kids get onto the buses and made sure they got on the right bus.

Louise Losos: I believe so. It's been so long that I don't...I just remember...

Blanche Touhill: Did you have a striped orange vest?

Louise Losos: The orange thing, yes.

Blanche Touhill: And did you get to leave the class a little early to go out?

Louise Losos: It would rotate so I think those weeks that I was, yes, but it would rotate through my classmates.

Blanche Touhill: How wonderful.

Louise Losos: We went to a very small elementary school. There were typically only two sections, two classes at each grade level. There were about 50 kids in a grade. It's no longer open. It was small. They eventually closed it.

Blanche Touhill: Are you part of the baby boomers?

Louise Losos: No, I'm Generation X.

Blanche Touhill: So you missed the baby boomers?

Louise Losos: My brother is the tail end of the baby boom. He was born in '61 and I think my sister was born in '63, technically is right on the edge, but I'm Generation X.

Blanche Touhill: What does Generation X mean?

Louise Losos: The generation after the baby boomers, smaller. We were, as enrollment started to go down so that you had closing schools, that great expansion and then you had the contraction educationally. You know, every generation is picked on by the generation that's in front of them. So now we're picking on the millennials as being apathetic, XY and Z. We were the latchkey children, the first ones that hit the wave of divorces. My parents did not. Children who came home to empty...you know, the latchkey and all that. I grew up in the era of the Nancy Reagan and the "Just say no" campaigns, Schoolhouse Rock...love Schoolhouse Rock. So, that generation. I'm sure there's more to it but we're going to be that

generation that's sandwiched between two very large generations, a little bit like my dad's generation. It's kind of skipped in a way in terms of leadership at the national level, I think, to a degree, but that's okay.

Blanche Touhill: So he was really born in the '30s sometime?

Louise Losos: They were both born in the early '30s. They're a year apart. I won't give the year because I can't say their ages.

Blanche Touhill: No, but I'm just saying, that was a very small group.

Louise Losos: Right, correct. They were born in the early '30s and then you had the baby boomers who were born after World War II.

Blanche Touhill: Did you grow up in the same neighborhood as your mother and father?

Louise Losos: Nearby. St. Louis is not that large so my parents both grew up in U City for most of their lives, although my dad moved into...or his parents moved into Ladue. I'm not sure if he grew up in Ladue. So as the Jewish population moved west, we grew up within 10 miles of where they grew up.

Blanche Touhill: So your generation and your parents' generation went to the University City public schools?

Louise Losos: My parents' generation went to the University City public schools. We went to Ladue schools. My mom was a big believer in public school education and so when she had children, she moved into the Ladue school district to send her kids to public schools. So we all graduated from the public school system all the way through.

Blanche Touhill: What about your high school, were you a leader in high school?

Louise Losos: Yes and no. I didn't have elected leadership roles. I can't say that I was a leader in my class. Academically, I was one of the leaders there but there were a group of us. I took a different path than my siblings. They were all very big into the speech and debate, that pathway and I did that my freshman year and I was very much not good at it. I was much more sports-oriented and the band. I was captain of my sports teams. We weren't any good but I was the captain of them, a section leader in the band, but not in the class as a whole.

Blanche Touhill: So, really, you were around when the reauthorization of Title Nine in 1972?

Louise Losos: Yes, absolutely, I was a direct beneficiary of Title Nine.

Blanche Touhill: And were you aware of that, even as a child or as a young person?

Louise Losos: It's hard to say. I don't think so necessarily. I remember seeing a story in the St. Louis Post Dispatch about a girl who was paving the way and played on a boys' baseball team and it upset me because I could play and, like, why is she so special? I was doing the same thing. But I played on girls sports teams in high school. We weren't very good and I do think that some of that...

Blanche Touhill: But you played between different high schools?

Louise Losos: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: It was like an intercollegiate but on the high school level?

Louise Losos: It was just as the boys did, just as the boys played. I can't say that I didn't know that they weren't there before because they were fully formed when I got there and there's more sports now but not that many more than when I was in high school, and some of them, like lacrosse, no one had back then.

Blanche Touhill: Squash?

Louise Losos: No, they don't have that now. That's very much an East Coast sport. I don't think St. Louis tends to have that. But, looking back, I was absolutely a beneficiary of Title Nine. I can't say that I knew it at the time because it was just...it's what I did. Now, again, looking back, there are now Little Leagues for girls, down to the little age. When I was starting, there weren't.

Blanche Touhill: So when you played Little League ball, you played on boys' teams?

Louise Losos: I would say for the first half. When I was hitting 5th and 6th grade, girls soccer leagues were there. And so they were beginning to offer girls Little League sports, towards the end of my childhood, I would say.

Blanche Touhill: What position did you play in baseball?

- Louise Losos: By the time I got to softball, I played second base and catcher. Baseball, I was too little; I don't remember.
- Blanche Touhill: I always thought catcher would be the hardest.
- Louise Losos: I never fully got over my fear of getting hit with the bat. That was hard. I can't say I was the greatest but I also didn't have great coaching.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you go to the Cardinal games?
- Louise Losos: Of course.
- Blanche Touhill: And the Browns?
- Louise Losos: Not the Browns, the Browns were gone by then. The Browns were earlier. My dad is not really a sports fan that's underpinning it. We were joking about this the other day. I remember going to one baseball game with my dad and the Cardinals played the Padres and he rooted for the Padres because it meant "fathers." But my brother was a sports fan and so he's the one that really taught me how to play sports and he would be the one who would...I would go to baseball games with him. He taught me about sports, more so than my father did. My dad, however, came to all my Little League games. I remember very clearly a soccer game. He would bring a folding chair and a book and he would read and he would look up periodically.
- Blanche Touhill: As you were playing?
- Louise Losos: As I was playing, he would look up periodically to see if I was involved in the action and then go back to reading. Softball or baseball was easier for him because he just had to wait and see if I was up at bat. There was a soccer game where the ball literally went under his chair and he just kept reading. But he was there and I knew he was there. It never bothered me that he was reading because, to me, I knew he didn't care for sports but he took me and he was always there and he never begrudged it.
- Blanche Touhill: I'm sure he enjoyed it because it wasn't easy for him to get there all the time, I'm sure.
- Louise Losos: It was always on the weekends. It's not like now. There might have been practice during the week and then athletics, my mom came to my games. I don't think my dad came to as many games as my mom because those

tended to be at 4:00 o'clock and he was working and it didn't bother me. It's just a different mindset nowadays. I knew my dad felt sports were fine but back then, as long as I got my academics up, he was fine with it. My mom supported it. If this is what I wanted to do, then she made sure I had every opportunity to do it. I had flute lessons. I enjoyed the flute. He would take me and pick me up from those or my mom would. I know that they were thrilled when I could drive.

Blanche Touhill: Were you anxious to drive?

Louise Losos: I think every 16-year-old back then was anxious to drive. It was freedom and an ability to control where you went and what you did. It's interesting, nowadays, I have friends whose 16-year-old children or 15-year-old don't immediately go get their permit. When I was in high school, on your 16th birthday, you would go and get your driver's license. There was no waiting. But, yeah, it gave a sense of freedom. Then my siblings would come home from college and I'd be back on the school bus.

Blanche Touhill: They would take the cars?

Louise Losos: They would take the cars. There's four and you're the lowest of the pecking order.

Blanche Touhill: Are you still friendly with people from the Ladue school system?

Louise Losos: I have one or two high school friends. I'm more like my dad. I'm a bit of a loner and so I make few but good friends. I actually ended up teaching there and so I still have good friends from the folks I taught with, more so than the folks I went to high school with, although I have some.

Blanche Touhill: Do you go to the reunions?

Louise Losos: I have. I went to my 20-year. My 30-year is coming up. I haven't decided yet whether to go to it. We'll see.

Blanche Touhill: Where did you go to college?

Louise Losos: I followed in the footsteps of my siblings. I went to Harvard College.

Blanche Touhill: And were you pleased with it?

Louise Losos: I was. It was a great experience. I studied history, enjoyed it. I was in the band while I was there.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you were in the band?

Louise Losos: I was, I was in a Harvard band.

Blanche Touhill: Did you play at athletic contests?

Louise Losos: We played at football games and hockey games and the occasional basketball game. It's not the marching band that you will see, like Ohio State or Mizzou or, like, the marching band that I was in in high school. If you've ever seen things like with the Stanford band, that's the kind of band we were. We would learn the music Friday night. Saturday morning we'd get up, we'd learn the routine so there was no marching. It was a lot of fun, not a huge time commitment. I played JV soccer when I was there. It wasn't very high level soccer. It was very much just a step above intramural. My senior year, they were raising the level so I no longer played. I wasn't good enough to play on that level of team and that was fine. But Harvard's the kind of place where the people around you are so...so many opportunities to meet people and talk with people and learn from others.

Blanche Touhill: How was it to go away from home, that far away?

Louise Losos: You know, it was just what you did. All of my siblings went there. My father had gone there. My mom went to Wash U so she stayed in town. But all my friends went away to college. I had found being in public education in St. Louis that I worked the Parkway school district and I would say 90% of the students who graduated from Parkway West went to school within about a six-hour drive because you would easily get there and easily get home and the parents, that was sort of the expectation. That was the realm of...whereas I graduated from Ladue and the opposite would be true. None of my high school friends went to school in St. Louis; very few went to school in Missouri. So, it was fine because it was just what you did and this was pre-cell phones and it forces you to grow up. You have to learn how to manage your time. You have to get a bank account. ATMs were just appearing at the end of my college tenure. You would call home once a week on Sunday because the rates were cheaper. Actually, your parents would typically call you and so you learned how to manage.

Blanche Touhill: Were any of your siblings there when you were?

Louise Losos: My sister, Carol, was a junior when I was a freshman.

Blanche Touhill: Did you room together at all?

Louise Losos: Oh, no. That's not how it worked. As a freshman, I was in the freshman dorm; she was in an upper class house which was the equivalent of a dorm. Then I was placed in a different upper class house but we would have dinner and we would see each other regularly. For the holidays, we would try and organize so we would be on the same flights. It was very helpful having her there. It was a safety net and so that was very nice. Then she could help sort of get my feet under me when I arrived.

Blanche Touhill: What kind of history did you major in?

Louise Losos: Early modern history, which means basically from the Middle Ages to the French Revolution, European history, which I loved. I felt like I had gotten a very good American history background and so I didn't feel like I needed that.

Blanche Touhill: Do you speak a language?

Louise Losos: I don't.

Blanche Touhill: But you read?

Louise Losos: I took Latin my senior year, took a pass/fail which was the smartest thing I did. I do not have a facility with languages. It's just not a forte of mine and so when I was deciding what to do post-college, if I wanted to go the doctoral route in my field, I would need to know Latin and/or French and so I took Latin and I enjoyed learning it but that sort of said to me, this is not a pathway for me... and so you read things in translation.

Blanche Touhill: Were you a leader in college?

Louise Losos: Not really. I was a strong participant but I did not lead in any of the organizations. In the band, because I played soccer in the fall, to be in a leadership program, you had to go to all the Saturday football games and I couldn't do that. So that prevented me from being in a leadership position and in the other organizations, I enjoyed participating. I didn't rise to the level of leadership in those.

Blanche Touhill: So go on.

Louise Losos: So, my junior year, I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do post-college. I knew there were areas that obviously I wasn't going to go to medical school. I had done no pre-med, had no interest. I wasn't interested in law school which was the kind of default for a lot of people, and I happened upon a program that the Harvard School of Education ran which was UTEP, the Undergraduate Teacher Education Program, which was designed to get...this is pre Teach for America...designed to get Harvard undergraduates into the public schools. And so I'd always been told, "Oh, you'd make a good teacher." I was a summer camp counselor for a couple summers and so I thought, I'll give that a try. So I graduated but stayed an extra year to finish certification, so I took some classes at the ed school. I student taught so I stayed in the Boston area and then I applied for teaching positions. I actually initially applied on the East Coast but this was 1991 and that was when there was a major recession and the types of schools I was applying to, an Ivy League graduate was not unique and social studies teachers, by and large, were a dime a dozen and so I ended up applying to schools back in St. Louis and got a teaching position where I taught at the new high school and so I started teaching one year out of college.

Blanche Touhill: On the high school level?

Louise Losos: On the high school level. So, remember, I studied Early Modern European History and I was teaching World History, all of history known to man in a year and so, fortunately, they were high school sophomores and I took enough history that I could stay a page or two ahead of them and, in high school, especially the board survey courses, are not taught at a very deep level. I will say, there was one year that we were about to start a Medieval History unit and I was smiling and one of my students asked why I was so happy. That was the three weeks where no matter what they asked me, I probably knew the answer or could sus out an answer. So I started teaching, all sophomores. Later, I also taught some American Government, a year of American History. I enjoyed working with teenagers a lot.

Blanche Touhill: Why?

Louise Losos: Teenagers are wonderful. They are so idealistic and excited. They truly believe they're going to change the world and I believe them. So, for the first five years, I taught only sophomores and I loved sophomores because they were still young enough and eager enough that they would do the goofy things that I would ask them to do, but old enough that you could have a conversation with them. Later, I added freshmen and then I loved freshmen because they were, in so many ways, still little kids. They were goofy and squirrely and I loved it. I never taught juniors or seniors but my guess is, if I taught juniors, I would love those. High school kids, they are incredibly honest, to a fault at times, and they tend to see things a little too black and white. The beauty of teaching Social Studies is I liked to push my students thinking, and so no matter what position they took, I took the other side because I wanted them to be able to justify their arguments, to be able to look at it from a different perspective because the reality is...and it's shown even more so now with, I have a cell phone in my purse which is an incredibly powerful computer. You know, except for a few dates that they ought to know, they don't really need to know dates. My brother once railed at me because he was never taught that the Magna Carta was signed in 1215. And I want to say, now how's that actually affected your life? If you need it, you can look it up, and that's been the challenge to the education.

Blanche Touhill: But the concept though...

Louise Losos: Exactly, what does it mean? How did that impact, because they're not going to remember...if you make them memorize dates, they're going to remember for the test and it's gone. But if they can remember those bigger picture ideas and what it means...I was at a meeting recently and it was a person who said, "Social studies teachers would like to thank Donald Trump for making American government and civics meaningful again," because people like to talk about how nasty this campaign is and I talk with my dad about this. They ought to look at Andrew Jackson's campaigns...

Blanche Touhill: And Jefferson and Quincy Adams.

Louise Losos: Oh, my God. To me, newspapers have returned to the era of yellow journalism and tabloidism. If it's not sensational, it's not going to run and I find that journalism, a lot of reporters aren't very good journalists anymore because they're being pushed to get it out, get it fast and what

they want are eyeballs. But this is not new. If you look at the Post-Dispatch, we can go back to Joseph Pulitzer's beginnings. So, education to me is about creating those critical thinkers that can look behind at the deeper meaning and be able to make those connections. So I love teaching. I love the kids.

Blanche Touhill: Are the tests that the state makes you take to judge whether the teacher is a success or not, I assume it doesn't measure critical thinking or does it? I don't know.

Louise Losos: They are better than when they first came out.

Blanche Touhill: Okay. So they have been continually reevaluating?

Louise Losos: The problem is, however, that 60, 70, 80% are still multiple choice and so you can only do so much critical thinking. Now, they try, they give you a passage, what is the author's intent or main meaning and they do have written responses and essays but, until now, most of the schools I worked with were high achieving schools and so you have a strong curriculum, the kids are going to do well. The problem is is that I work now with struggling schools and so those tests become the be all and the end all and then you spend so much of your time focused on that then it's not necessarily a terrible thing...it is a terrible thing; don't get me wrong. There's way too much testing and it's a moment in time and there's so much wrong with it. I find in education we go to extremes and so people want to be able, how do you measure schools? I'm going to get side-tracked here. The common core which came from the governors, not Obama, was designed because you had all of these state tests and every state has their own standards and so you would have Arkansas where 90% of their kids were passing and proficient than say, literacy in Missouri were 40% but we had a much more difficult test. We're comparing apples and oranges. So they wanted to create some sense of comparison across state boundaries. So they did that but then it became political and the tests were much harder and all of a sudden now we're moving away from that and we're going back to, they just approved new Missouri standards that are not necessarily good because it was too political but how do you then, as a parent, know if your school is successful? What do you take as a measure of that? No Child Left Behind, I worked for schools that hid behind their white populations and they were failing their African American students and it forced schools to pay

attention to under serving students with special needs, minority students and that's not necessarily a bad thing but the way they get there is not necessarily the way that is the most effective. Then it also creates this negativism towards teachers, starting, I would say, with the 1983, A Nation at Risk, teachers have become more and more targets and so if kids aren't successful, it's bad teachers. I am in awe of young teachers coming into this profession considering all the negativity that surrounds it in the national media, despite what you might see on Facebook. But that was a complete side-track.

Blanche Touhill: Don't you think they're drawn to the teaching profession as you were?

Louise Losos: They are, absolutely. No, there's no question, they are idealistic and young teachers are...when I was a principal I would call them "baby teachers." They brought an energy to a building and an excitement that...there was a time when I was principal, we had a building mostly of mid-career teachers and we actually emphasized hiring a few younger teachers to bring that energy and we also needed teachers to get involved in student activities and all that but they bring a different energy and that's wonderful.

Blanche Touhill: Well then, what happened to you after you taught for a year or two in Ladue?

Louise Losos: So, I started teaching and my plan had been, if I had gotten teaching on the East Coast, would be to teach for two or three years, decide if I wanted to do that and if I did, leave, get my Master's and then come back to St. Louis. Well, that got truncated and so about a year after I started teaching, I started working on my Master's in History at Wash U. I started at UMSL and then I transferred to Wash U...that's a whole different conversation...and so I was doing that concurrently. I found, about my seventh year of teaching, that, first of all, you talk about leadership; I became very much a leader in the building. I got very involved.

Blanche Touhill: In Ladue?

Louise Losos: In Ladue, as a teacher. I got involved in committees, professional development committees, both at the building and the district level and then I started chairing a number of these committees and so I began taking leadership roles as a teacher and I hit a point, around my seventh year of teaching, where I was getting tired in the classroom, teaching the

same thing and I have tremendous respect for teachers who can teach for 25 or 30 years but it became clear to me that that was not going to be me. And the sign for me was when I became a little too complacent with taking the lesson from the year before and implementing it without making changes or making only minor changes because typically you adapt and you adjust it to the students in front of you and to, okay, this is what I did last year. What worked well? What didn't work well? When I became a little bit, I would almost say lazy in some of that, but complacent is probably a better word, that was the signal to me that I needed to decide what the next step was. So at the end of my Master's program in history, I looked into the administrative program at St. Louis University and so I took a class, decided I liked it so I started working on my doctorate in educational leadership. And so I'm still teaching.

Blanche Touhill: But you were still teaching through all of this?

Louise Losos: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So go on.

Louise Losos: After about eight years of teaching...excuse me...actually took a sabbatical and went to SLU full-time for a year which cut about two years off my program and came back and taught for another year. I got my administrative certification. I actually ran into a little bit of problem there but I got my administrative certification and was still trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I was very much questioning and so I taught for eight years, took a sabbatical, taught for a year and then I got a fellowship to spend a year in Israel.

Blanche Touhill: To work on a Ph.D. or just to sort of go and experience another school system?

Louise Losos: Not even a school system. It had nothing to do with that. The sabbatical was for my professional growth. This was almost for my soul. It was a program called Dorot Year in Israel Fellowship. There were 15 of us so it was a program where you go to school half time and then you do some sort of volunteer activity.

Blanche Touhill: Did you go to Hebrew University?

Louise Losos: I didn't. I went to what's called Pardesse which is an egalitarian yeshiva where men and women study together, a wonderful program. My volunteer work was at Hebrew University with the...I'm not going to remember it now but it was through the educational department there so that continued. And I finished, I wrote my dissertation while I was there.

Blanche Touhill: On that topic?

Louise Losos: No. I did my research before I left. I compared the motivations of public, private and parochial high school teachers, which was fascinating and a little bit depressing. I found a survey that had been created and all the vetting had been done, all the statistical analyses and I gave it to teachers in five public schools, five non-sectarian private schools of which there really are only five, if you don't count logos and then six parochial schools and it's six because I had two co-ed, two all-male, two all-female and they were color-coded so I could tell what...and actually, the way it worked...they probably wouldn't let me do this now...is I knew what school they were coming from so...like, I had one school where none of them...I put them into teachers' mailboxes and I had a raffle for if you would return it and I could tell one school wasn't returning it and so I gave a call and it got worked out. And then I did the statistical analyses and what I found was that parochial schools, I think there were, like, 30 different items. I can't remember in full...parochial schools were significantly, in a statistical sense, more motivated than public school teachers in all but three areas and the three areas were, like, pay, benefits and something else and that private school teachers and parochial school teachers were almost spot-on together. I also did a little bit of qualitative and what I took from that really is that parochial schools have very much a clear sense of who they are and what they believe, and there's an ethos to it and if you're going to work in a parochial school, you're going to be paid less and you know you're going to be paid less which means that your sense of mission almost has to be that much higher because you choose to work in that setting. For public high schools...this was just high schools...that had a clear sense of who they were, they knew who they were and what they really stood for, the motivation was higher than in just sort of the generic public schools. So I had my research, my data and then when I was in Israel, I spent part of the time, actually wrote my dissertation and I would send it...

Blanche Touhill: Well, you must be a very disciplined person.

Louise Losos: Well, some of it...like, you have classes that the first chapter or the second chapter, we had to do the literature review, that was done. It was mostly the statistical analysis and the conclusion. I suppose. I wanted to get it done. You had all this time, had [inaudible 40:30] and so I did learn that there's a difference between $8\frac{1}{2}$ by 11 and $8/10$ which is what the Europeans do because that was driving me crazy because I would buy paper there and the formatting wasn't right. So I ended up having to...I came back to defend my dissertation which I passed. That was, like, in March, and I bought the high quality paper, I bought, like, four reams and took it back with me to get it...because then you have to have it sent in for the final binding and all that because I wasn't confident I could get the paper I needed in Israel...a little miniature lesson, so I got my Ph.D. when I was in Israel and I applied for assistant principal jobs from Israel, had two phone interviews and the first one I just bombed. It was with Ladue where I had been teaching and that was a good lesson because I tried to answer the questions how I thought they wanted to hear as opposed to what I thought. And so the second one, I was just myself on the phone with the person who turned out to be my future boss. First of all, we connected and it was a much more natural conversation.

Blanche Touhill: But you did not know that person before?

Louise Losos: I didn't.

Blanche Touhill: And what school district was that?

Louise Losos: That was at Parkway, at Parkway West High School.

Blanche Touhill: Who was the principal?

Louise Losos: Beth Plunkett. I found out later that I agree with her. She believes you need to have a sense of humor and so, toward the end of the phone interview, she said, "Well, let me tell you a little bit about my administrative team" and she was talking about them and she said, "The athletic director, he's a graduate of Cornell." I said, "That's nice" and she said, "And my son just graduated from Princeton." I said, "Oh, well, that could be a problem," clearly a joke and she knew then that I had a sense of humor. So she waited three weeks because I had three more weeks

before I came back and I came back and interviewed when I returned and got the job.

Blanche Touhill: And how long were you with Parkway?

Louise Losos: I was with Parkway for five years.

Blanche Touhill: And did you like it?

Louise Losos: Oh, I loved it. Parkway West was a phenomenal place. As teachers go, it was the happiest group of teachers and it goes back to my dissertation.

Blanche Touhill: They had a mission.

Louise Losos: They knew who they were. The culture was fantastic and they were vested in it and it was a great experience. I was the principal of the class of 2004. I took them from freshman year through graduation and then I started with the class of 2008, so I was there five years.

Blanche Touhill: Did they stay?

Louise Losos: What do you mean, did they stay?

Blanche Touhill: Did the students stay or did they move in and out of the district?

Louise Losos: There wasn't a whole lot of movement, not like where I am now but there was some. I started with a class of, I think, 440, and I graduated a class of about 415. Some of them ended up going to the alternative school. Some of them ended up going to private schools.

Blanche Touhill: What is the alternative school?

Louise Losos: They've changed it. For a while it was called Fern Ridge. It was designed as a school for students who did not learn in a traditional way. And so the idea was, kids who were perfectly capable but struggled in a traditional high school.

Blanche Touhill: Did they come on the school bus to Parkway West?

Louise Losos: Yes, they'd come to Parkway West and then the bus would take them to Fern Ridge. I believe that's right, yes. It has morphed over time. I think it has changed a little bit.

Blanche Touhill: So they took part in the student activities at Parkway West?

Louise Losos: They could, yes. If they wanted to play on a sports team. Now, typically speaking, these were very alternative kids and so they were unlikely to want to play on sports teams but they had a very strong sense. I mean, they had their own graduation ceremony at Fern Ridge. They got a Fern Ridge diploma and so they didn't want to be at Parkway West necessarily. Some did but they had their own...it was their own school and they could play on our sports teams but they really were Fern Ridge kids and I had a number of students who, it was the best thing that happened to them, some who came back, it didn't quite work out, but it was...I've worked in school districts that are both large and small and there are strengths and weaknesses of each. The large have an economy of scale that you can do things like an alternative high school that is very...

Blanche Touhill: Is meaningful.

Louise Losos: Competely. Smaller school districts struggle with those kids on the fringe.

Blanche Touhill: And they have to have the right teacher.

Louise Losos: Absolutely. It's all about relationship, for the most part, especially for those kids who struggle.

Blanche Touhill: Well, up to this point, your career was moving along.

Louise Losos: Right.

Blanche Touhill: And you sort of had a vision of where you wanted to go?

Louise Losos: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: So you wanted to have your own school?

Louise Losos: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So what happened?

Louise Losos: So it was my fifth year as an assistant principal and I felt like I was ready to start looking. That was the first year I felt I was ready to start looking for my own building. I knew I needed to take a class all the way through and have that experience. You learn a lot and I worked for Beth Plunkett who's amazing and I learn from her every day. And so I started keeping an eye on job postings. I knew I didn't want a big high school. I don't have a great facility with names. It's not a strength of mine and that's very

much a weakness in that particular field. And so I didn't want a large high school so I was looking at the smaller high schools and Clayton popped up and it shocked me. I knew that they'd never had a female principal. I also knew that they'd never hired someone without head principal experience before. But I decided to apply

Blanche: Touhill: And you got it.

Louise Losos: And I got it.

Blanche Touhill: And what were your goals for Clayton?

Louise Losos: For the first year, my goal was to learn their culture. Every school has a different culture and I think it's important to understand it before you try and change it and Clayton is very much a very different culture.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, it is.

Louise Losos: Because of where it is, it has an open campus...

Blanche Touhill: And its faculty is very different.

Louise Losos: It is, yes and no. High school faculties are different than elementary school faculties to start with but then a very high powered faculty. I would say that if you looked at the capabilities of teachers in a building, it's a bell curve, from truly outstanding to shouldn't be in the classroom and Clayton's faculty was shifted to the right. The weakest teacher was merely just good whereas I've been in places where it shifted the other direction. But you also have a very strong parent population, a very involved parent population and it has an open campus. Kids don't necessarily have to have classes every period of the day, which is completely unique in this area. I spent a lot of that first year going, "Help." Really, we do it that way, but then I would step back and say, okay, why? Do I disagree with this, and if I disagree with this, is this something that I need to change, i.e., it's ethically wrong or it's dangerous? Otherwise, I would step back and I would let it play out to see what that looked like and what it meant and then work to change it. So it was a high performing school and my goal was to see how I could keep it high performing but then make it better. And so I worked to work with...I'm a very collaborative leader. I learned that. I don't believe I have all the answers and I think part of that comes from being the youngest of

four with really smart siblings. I had learned at an early age that there's lots of different views and being the youngest of four often... (laughs).

Blanche Touhill: You can profit from those different views

Louise Losos: You can and so I believe in bringing the voices around the table and there were times that the voices around the table would make the decision and there were other times when they would inform my decision and tried to make clear when it was one and when it was the other. When we would see problems arise, then, all right, what do we need to do and try and get at, what are the bigger issues? What are the underlying issues as well as are there structural things that we need to change? Are there structural barriers that we have set up that we need to alter, intended or unintended?

Blanche Touhill: Well, you know, somebody expressed to me, who was a life-long teacher and then went into administration that her goal was to take the impediments away from the teachers.

Louise Losos: I like that.

Blanche Touhill: I thought that was a wonderful expression because that's the role, really, of administration, to clear the way.

Louise Losos: It is. My goal is to make their jobs easier.

Blanche Touhill: That's right.

Louise Losos: I'm in Central Office now. If there is something that needs to be done that I can do so that they don't have to, I should do that and as teachers, not to create more things on their plate. So, as an administrator, you try and protect the teachers from parents when necessary. I will take far more guff from a parent than I would ever expect a teacher to take. I would tell teachers they should never allow a parent to yell at them. Just tell them, "I'm sorry...when you calm down" but I will take the anger and then try and calm the parent down before we have those meetings. Teachers make mistakes but those should be resolved behind closed doors.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have more of that in a high powered school than where you are today?

Louise Losos: Oh, absolutely. I will take the over involved parent to the under involved parent any day.

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Louise Losos: In Clayton, they hold you to a high standard. The parents of Clayton, by and large, have options and they've chosen to live in a school district where there's high housing prices to access the public school education and as a result, it's not quite the private school expectation (mumbles) but there's an element of that where they're not going to sit back for a bad experience or if there are problems and can't say everything was smooth or everything was perfect but you work through it.

Blanche Touhill: How many years were you at Clayton?

Louise Losos: I was there for seven years.

Blanche Touhill: And then where did you go?

Louise Losos: I have had a year off where I actually got my MBA at Webster and now I work for a group of charter schools in the city, the Confluence Charter Schools. We have five schools spread throughout the city. I'm the director of curriculum. It's been a crash course in urban education. We have one school, I equate it to a magnate school which is an art school, Grand Center Arts Academy, which has...

Blanche Touhill: That's one of the five?

Louise Losos: That's one of the five. It's six through twelve. It has actually students who come from the county so about 30% of those students are Caucasian. The rest are African American. The other four buildings, we have three basically elementaries and then a middle high school, are 99% minority, mostly African American. We have one school that has about a 40% Hispanic population and they are almost entirely free and reduced lunch. We have a school that's north of 70. That's our most at-risk population. You would think with all these kids, it is the at-risk of the at-risk population. You asked me earlier about Parkway West, how many of the kids stayed. Well, we have tremendous mobility with our families now and so one of the issues is kids are constantly...

Blanche Touhill: What do you do with curriculum to meet all those different needs?

Louise Losos: Well, when I arrived three years ago, they didn't really have any curriculum. The school system had been run by a for-profit company and I tend to believe that for-profit in education are anti-thetical and the board had decided to remove the for-profit company and become self-managed and so I arrived a year after that. It's a transition that most schools don't survive but we did and so I was also a year away from the common core being tested and so what I did is started with ELA math and groups of teachers to decide what curriculum we're going to model ourselves after.

Blanche Touhill: K-12? Well, it would depend on the charter schools?

Louise Losos: Well, so, at that time, three of our schools were K-8 and we had a high school.

Blanche Touhill: The high school is the performing arts?

Louise Losos: No, we have another high school. So, the performing arts school had a principal. It had a consultant, Linda Henke who was involved in their curriculum there and they were very much managing their own curriculum.

Blanche Touhill: If you look back over your long career in education, what are you most proud of, one or two or three or four things. It doesn't make any difference.

Louise Losos: I'm proud of the work I did at each of the districts I worked in. I'm proud of my career as a teacher. I sponsored a leadership group and the work I did with those kids I'm extremely proud of. As an assistant principal...

Blanche Touhill: That was in Ladue?

Louise Losos: That was in Ladue and Parkway West, I'm very proud of both my students, my kids and helping them grow. The thing I'm most proud of each is watching the people I work with grow and develop and become better.

Blanche Touhill: And you felt you had encouraged them to do this?

Louise Losos: I feel like I had a role in all of that, as an assistant principal.

Blanche Touhill: And especially that freshman class that you took through?

- Louise Losos: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: Now, do you go to those reunions?
- Louise Losos: I haven't been invited, especially the frequent flyers, the kids who were in my office a lot because 90% of what you do as an assistant principal is discipline, helping those kids grow and not appear in my office as much as well as working with the leaders.
- Blanche Touhill: Go on to the next school.
- Louise Losos: So at Clayton, I'm very proud of how the teachers, the young teachers I hired developed and how we, as a building, got better and grew and the structures I put in place.
- Blanche Touhill: How did it get better?
- Louise Losos: I feel like that the top kids were absolutely being served and had a great educational experience. I feel like I worked with the teachers and my other administrators to put structures in place to help kids in the middle and the kids who struggle grow and be successful and to truly make sure that they had all of the opportunities that every kid had and just working with individuals and helping people become better at what they're doing and the people who are still there that have just grown tremendously, some of that due to my influence.
- Blanche Touhill: I always thought that Clayton was great for a high-powered kid. I wasn't so certain about a kid who was sort of shy and retiring.
- Louise Losos: The beauty of Clayton High School is that they have opportunities for whoever you are. If you're a theater kid...
- Blanche Touhill: And did you help to grow that?
- Louise Losos: I did. I wouldn't say grow it as well as help it shine. Early on in my tenure there...because I went to all of the plays and all the performances and clearly that hadn't always been done.
- Blanche Touhill: You showed your interest.
- Louise Losos: I did. I made sure that the kids knew that I valued the theater program as much as I valued the football team or the science kids who were doing

rockets and that I cared as much about their growth and what they did afterwards.

Blanche Touhill: So go on to your last...

Louise Losos: I'm very proud of what I'm doing now because I took a district that had no curriculum and working with teachers, we now have a viable, strong, growing stronger curriculum that, when we hire new teachers, that they actually have something they can work from.

Blanche Touhill: And are they doing better on the tests?

Louise Losos: We're getting there. The test changed so it's a little harder.

Blanche Touhill: I know.

Louise Losos: We'll know this fall. The stats are coming back not until September but I'm very proud of what I've helped create...not me alone but with others.

Blanche Touhill: Let me go on and just ask you: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what would you be doing?

Louise Losos: I wouldn't be an administrator because females weren't administrators. I'd probably still be in the classroom teaching but it's hard to say because I have a very traditional career in many ways so I probably still would have been a teacher but I would have probably remained at a building level.

Blanche Touhill: Have you gotten an award or some awards that you're very proud of?

Louise Losos: Myself personally, not really. I feel like the jobs that I've gotten have been awards for me. The success that my schools have had, my second and last year at Clayton, we were the top school in the state. We had more national merit semi-finalists than anyone else, beating any other school in the state. We were, like, in the top 100 in the country. I was very proud of that but that was a measure of the kids and the teachers but I felt like I had a role in helping create that.

Blanche Touhill: Do you have a theme in your life?

Louise Losos: I think learning is my theme. I constantly have sought out opportunities to grow in my profession and in my personal life. I was teaching and getting my Master's and getting my Ph.D. Between jobs, I went to school

and got my MBA. I'm taking some courses right now online about HR because I'm thinking that might be a path in the future. So I would say that I've never stopped learning and growing, which is probably good for an educator.

Blanche Touhill: Isn't it interesting that you kept moving.

Louise Losos: I don't think so. I think that's not uncommon in administration.

Blanche Touhill: Today?

Louise Losos: Yeah. I mean, I would say that I left Clayton more quickly than I would have liked to have left. Parkway, I loved Parkway West and assistant principal, I was never going to be a career assistant principal. I knew that. I had loved the job as it was but I was not going to do that for 20 or 30 years. I wouldn't have minded being a high school principal longer.

Blanche Touhill: Okay. Is there anything you want to talk about?

Louise Losos: You know, you asked about influences and role models and as I look back on my career, there are, like, three women who I can think of, they're all women who have been mentors in my life, outside of my mother. My mother's been the strongest and the most consistent. That one's a given to me because she's amazing and she's truly been a role model and my hero throughout but in my career, there have been three women older than I am who have seen something in me and helped me grow, people I still turn to now.

Blanche Touhill: Do you want to mention them?

Louise Losos: Sure, Beth Plunkett being one, my principal at Parkway West High School; Kathy Blackmore at Parkway, she was head of Professional Development, and then Teaching & Learning there, and then Mary Dee Schmidt who worked for the American Youth Foundation and I sponsored teen leadership, remarkable people who I just think are amazing.

Blanche Touhill: What did they each give you?

Louise Losos: Confidence. They gave me a belief in myself that I could do it.

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much. It was a lovely conversation.

Louise Losos: Thank you. Indeed.

Blanche Touhill: I appreciate your coming.

Louise Losos: I'm happy to do it.