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**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

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**ELLEN MOCERRI INTERVIEWED BY BLANCHE TOUHILL**

Blanche Touhill: Would you introduce yourself?

Ellen Mocerri: Sure, I'm Ellen Mocerri:, I've been in independent schooling for 49 years, starting as a teacher and then being a department chair and a director of college counseling and director of studies. Then I became a head of school, for three different schools: one Episcopal school in Greenville, South Carolina; an international school, head of the American School Foundation in Mexico City, and I ended my career at Ransom Everglades in Miami, Florida, a wonderful independent school.

Blanche Touhill: Wonderful. Would you talk about your early life: your parents; your grandparents; your cousins; your elementary school; your secondary school. Who helped you along the way? Who said to you "you have ability or you have a leadership quality?" Just talk about your early life.

Ellen Mocerri: Sure. Well, I was very fortunate, I had a lot of aspirational messages very early on. First of all, my father was most unique because this was in the mid '50s, you know, when I was growing up and that was a time when women weren't exactly in the forefront. My father had five daughters and I don't know what he would have done...and I was the oldest, of course; you can sort of tell it in my career...and I don't know what he would have done had he had sons, but he gave the message to all of us that we had to stand on our own, that it didn't make a difference who we married; that wasn't the important thing. We had to be something and we had to be self-reliant and that was a strong message for women. My dad would come home for dinner every night and he would raise issues about politics and what was going on in the world. He didn't want to hear any little back talk and gossip that went on in school. That didn't interest him. I spent most summers with my grandmother, who was French and she gave me a sense of beauty and what is the aesthetic world and a love

for literature. We never talked about shopping or any of those things. It was all about very aesthetic, analytical kinds of things.

Blanche Touhill: Now, where did she live?

Ellen Mocerri: Well, she lived in the United States. She had moved to the United States but she was born in Paris and so I spent summers in Upstate New York with her and my grandfather and I also got this message from living in that house; it was a very old house, but five generations of my family went to West Point, so when you went into that house, the walls were covered with the leaders of my family. They were male leaders, granted, but still, the message was leadership and, by the way, my first cousin, she got that same message because she was the first four-star general in the history of the American Army, women, and so we all got the message that we were supposed to do something in this world. Both of my great grandparents went to college. They both went to West Point. That was unusual in that time. I think as a teacher that gave me a great sense of who I could be and what I should be was Miss Colonius, my debate teacher at Alton Senior High School. She just taught me how to express myself and how to be an effective speaker and how to say what I thought and to back it up with facts. She never liked glittering generalities. If you couldn't prove what you had to say, don't bother. Again, that was not your normal female message. Then I had an aunt who was a businesswoman and her message to me was always, "You must be something." She didn't say what it was but that was the message. So I kind of was surrounded. I also was the first grandchild so all of the adults in my family talked to me a lot as if I were an adult. So I never really was treated as a child; I always was treated as someone who had thoughts and was intelligent and was worth speaking to. So that was kind of how I grew up, very different from most women then. When I went to Washington University, most of my sorority sisters wanted to marry the doctor, the lawyer, the Indian chief. I had watched my mother, who came from this military family, as a doctor's wife, she wasn't happy but she couldn't be any other thing. It wasn't allowed then. You had to stay home. So I watched her and I saw how frustrated she was. So I didn't want to marry the successful person; I wanted to be the successful person, a different message, yes.

Blanche Touhill: And what about your siblings?

Ellen Mocerri: Well, I have four younger sisters. One of them, unfortunately, died in a fire.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how horrible.

Ellen Mocerri: Yeah, it was a very tragic accident in my family but I have three younger sisters. One of them was a trust council of a bank; another is a physical therapist and the third is a nurse.

Blanche Touhill: They all got the message?

Ellen Mocerri: They all got the message, all got the message. I would say I was the most long-term committed to leadership of all of them. They all kind of cut out earlier to raise the family and then didn't go back into professionalism with a great kind of vigor that I did but that was always my deal. I wasn't going to stay home and raise children. I have a child but I wasn't going to stay home and raise him, no.

Blanche Touhill: When you went to high school and elementary school and you talk about being on the debate team, were you on any other activities?

Ellen Mocerri: Yeah, I was in the drama club, I was in a lot of plays. I was head of the year book; I was head of the National Honor Society; I was head of the French Club; I ran for president of the student body at that time and I ran against the quarterback of the football team. You can imagine who won.

Blanche Touhill: Well, in those days, I would think the boy would be the president of the class.

Ellen Mocerri: Absolutely, but the fact that I thought I should run and could run was kind of unusual.

Blanche Touhill: You didn't become the vice president?

Ellen Mocerri: No, no, no, no, that was it and so I took a lot of leadership roles but I was in student government but I never became the president of the class. You really didn't in those days as women.

Blanche Touhill: When you played, did you play with boys and girls?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, played with boys and girls and in the summertime, in upstate New York, my mother having five kids, she didn't have...I was the oldest one so I was lucky, I got to kind of leave home at 8:00 o'clock in the morning and

come back at 4:00 in the afternoon and my cousin and I just went through all the hills and dales of upstate New York and waterfalls and parks and just explored everything on our own. So nobody was overseeing us.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have bicycles?

Ellen Mocerri: We had bicycles and we walked and we swam all day and we swam across the lake, Lake Uga, and we just were out there and my mother said, "Take care of yourself" and that was a great blessing. I feel sorry for these kids who have these helicopter parents because the whole message to them is "you can't take care of yourself" and that's a bad message.

Blanche Touhill: What is the helicopter parent? What is the definition of a helicopter parent?

Ellen Mocerri: To me, a helicopter parent is someone who hovers constantly and then swoops in and rescues and so they do both things. They're always hovering, hovering, hovering, and then when something happens, they swoop in and they take care of it, and it teaches kids that they can't take care of themselves. It's a very bad message.

Blanche Touhill: So you've run into that in your life as a teacher and as a...

Ellen Mocerri: Yeah, a whole lot and it gets worse; it's gotten worse in my 49 years. I didn't see it so much in the beginning as I do now. I think parents are very nervous about the world, for good reason, and what their kids are going to be and how they're going to be it and whether they're going to be economically successful. So they tend to be overly watchful.

Blanche Touhill: At what age do they pull back?

Ellen Mocerri: I'm not sure they do. It's amazing to me how kids...I mean, when I went to college, you called home once a week on Sunday evening, "Hi, I'm okay, great; send me some money." Today, they talk to their kids constantly, on cell phones and text them and "where are you?" ...

Blanche Touhill: Even when they go away?

Ellen Mocerri: Even when they go away. It's amazing to me and not very healthy, I don't believe.

Blanche Touhill: Were there other teachers that you liked that were inspirations?

Ellen Mocerri: In my high school, all my inspirational teachers were women and I went to Alton Senior High which was a very large high school and it integrated while I was there, meaning, black students came there for the first time.

Blanche Touhill: Was that due to Brown versus The Board of Education?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, it was, and I remember when it was integrated and I remember being very angry with my drama teacher because he refused to cast blacks in any of the plays. And so I led...I guess this was my first protest movement...I led a protest and a petition of the kids in the drama club that they wouldn't be in any more plays unless they were willing to cast blacks in the plays. So I guess my high school experience taught me of the incredible inequalities that existed. I mean, I'm where I am because of the accident of birth. What I did with the accident of birth is another thing but let's face it, I started with a leg up. My father was an internist; my mother was a very intelligent woman. My whole family was educated and I saw these black kids in our school who really had very little opportunity and it seemed to me that one of the roles we needed to play was to give them some opportunity. The teachers I loved were women. My English teacher was a battleaxe and she loved grammar, very outmoded but, man, do I know grammar. Can I write or what?! Then I loved Ms. Colonius, my debate teacher. She really trained my mind and she made me a good public speaker which has been, in my career, absolutely necessary.

Blanche Touhill: Did you ever go back and say thank you?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, I did. I went back, I took her out to dinner and I told her how much I cared about her and what she had meant to me and women in those days who were teachers were all unmarried because...

Blanche Touhill: ...they couldn't marry.

Ellen Mocerri: That's correct.

Blanche Touhill: If you married, you'd lose your job.

Ellen Mocerri: Precisely so there were a lot of unmarried women. Then Ms. Blanchette, who was my French teacher and she was just a lovely lady that I came to admire. So those were my teachers. When I got to college, I had no

female teachers. They were all male. They were all interesting. I majored in Poli Sci and French and my Poli Sci teachers were great. I went to Wash U, loved it. My father had gone there and gone to medical school so his first child had to go to Wash U, no question. Also, I wanted to go to Cornell because it was near my family's upstate New York summer home but my dad said, "No, no, no, they're commie-pinko professors there. You cannot go there." Unfortunately, there were commie-pinko professors at Wash U so he kind of lost on that one. So I became liberalized. My father was to the right of Attila the Hun, very, very conservative and I'm the black sheep of the family. I'm the most liberal one in the family.

Blanche Touhill: When you went to Washington U, did you join a sorority?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, Delta Gamma.

Blanche Touhill: But they didn't have rooms in those days?

Ellen Mocerri: No.

Blanche Touhill: And Adele Starbor, was she...

Ellen Mocerri: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: ...she was the...

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, Adele was there.

Blanche Touhill: Did you know Adele?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, of course I did.

Blanche Touhill: And would you comment on Adele? Did you know her that well?

Ellen Mocerri: She just was what I would call a proper lady, a lady who gave a sense of decorum and how one should behave if one were a lady because we met in the women's building, which is where we met and we had rooms in the women's building...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, the sororities?

Ellen Mocerri: Exactly, and so Adele kind of stood for the behavior and the protocol that we were supposed to use. Not everyone followed that but that's what she stood for.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I mention Adele because I used to read her column.

Ellen Mocerri: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And you do get that sense.

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, she was a very proper lady with very good values and she wanted that to permeate the women's building and sororities, et cetera, et cetera, yeah. No, I loved Wash U. My husband didn't, he majored in English and his professors were dismal but mine were wonderful. Poli Sci professors are very involved in the world and so it's not a stuffy kind of thing. It's just interesting and engaged in the world.

Blanche Touhill: So you met your husband at Wash U?

Ellen Mocerri: I met my husband, yes. We met in a twist contest.

Blanche Touhill: You mean that game that you...

Ellen Mocerri: No, the dance.

Blanche Touhill: What's a twist...

Ellen Mocerri: The dance, the twist.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, the twist, oh, yes.

Ellen Mocerri: You know, Chubby Checker, the twist, yeah, because Delta Gamma and he was Sigma Ki were entering their couple in the twist contest so we were the...and we won.

Blanche Touhill: You mean, you danced with your husband?

Ellen Mocerri: Oh, yes, oh, yes. We love to dance, mm-hmm, so we met kind of dancing, I suppose and we've been dancing ever since.

Blanche Touhill: Where do you dance today?

Ellen Mocerri: We don't, no. I had a leg injury so that cut short my dancing career but we danced for a long time.

Blanche Touhill: Where did you dance in St. Louis before then?

Ellen Mocerri: Oh, we just went to parties and danced, yeah. We didn't go to the ballrooms. We didn't do that, no.

Blanche Touhill: Did Washington U have dances?

Ellen Mocerri: Oh, God, yes. All the fraternities and sororities had dances but they had them mostly in rooms off campus, like the Blue Room that was in...where is the Blue Room? I think it's on the hill. So from Wash U...

Blanche Touhill: What was the big dance place in South St. Louis? It's still there.

Ellen Mocerri: The Casa Loma Ballroom?

Blanche Touhill: Casa Loma. I understand that the Mexican-Americans are now...

Ellen Mocerri: Well, good.

Blanche Touhill: A couple of nights a week, they dance at Casa Loma.

Ellen Mocerri: Well, I'm very happy to hear that, yes.

Blanche Touhill: And they have Big Band nights and jazz and...

Ellen Mocerri: That was very popular in our time, yes.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you graduated from Washington U?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, I graduated with my AB Degree in French and Political Science and then I got a Master's Degree in Political Science.

Blanche Touhill: So you stayed another year?

Ellen Mocerri: Two years.

Blanche Touhill: And were you a TA or anything?

Ellen Mocerri: No, because I was...

Blanche Touhill: Were women TA's in those days?

Ellen Mocerri: They were but I was teaching.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you were working?

Ellen Mocerri: Oh, yes, I was working.

Blanche Touhill: And then you went to school at 4:00 o'clock or something?

Ellen Mocerri: Right, at 4:00 o'clock, yes, and in the summertime I would take maybe four courses, in the summertime.

Blanche Touhill: Where did you teach?

Ellen Mocerri: I taught, first of all, at Whitfield School, which was a teeny, wonderful little school then and it's expanded.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I remember that.

Ellen Mocerri: Yeah, and while I was there, I kept hearing about John Burroughs School so I thought, well, I think I'm going to go to John Burroughs, which I did and I was there for 25 years.

Blanche Touhill: So you just worked at Whitfield to get started and then when you got a little experience, you went over to Burroughs?

Ellen Mocerri: Right. You see, what happened is, when I graduated from college, I had done a year at the Sorbonne in Paris and so I was very internationally oriented and so I wanted a business. I wanted to go in business, international business, and believe it or not, I thought being a buyer of china at Stix Baer & Fuller would be a great thing to do, to buy china.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, buy china, porcelain.

Ellen Mocerri: Porcelain, yes, and so I worked for them for three months to train to be a buyer and it was a dismal experience because no one in three months discussed an idea of any kind and so I thought, I can't live in this world without ideas; I can't. And my husband was a teacher at U City High School and he said, "Well, why don't you try to be a teacher?" I said...

Blanche Touhill: And he taught English?

Ellen Mocerri: And he taught English and I said, "But I've never taken any education courses. I can't do this," and he said, "Well, look in the newspaper. Look for an ad." So there was an ad from Whitfield and they said, "We want someone to do the following: to teach 7<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies; 9<sup>th</sup> grade French; 12<sup>th</sup> grade American Problems; coach softball, field hockey and modern dance.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful.

Ellen Mocerri: And I said, "I can do that."

Blanche Touhill: How wonderful.

- Ellen Mocerri: That's how I got...
- Blanche Touhill: You could do all three?
- Ellen Mocerri: That's how I got into teaching, yes.
- Blanche Touhill: You could do all three.
- Ellen Mocerri: Yes, I could. I'd done a lot of dance in high school and in college so I could teach modern dance. Field hockey, I'd have to say, I was more of a coach. I didn't know the game that well. I just cheered them on when they did good things but while I was there, I kept hearing about Burroughs and Burroughs really, I have to say, defined my sense of what excellence in education is.
- Blanche Touhill: Let's go back to the Sorbonne. How was that year?
- Ellen Mocerri: Wonderful, fabulous. Wash U went to Strasbourg. That's where they went and I did not want to go to Strasbourg because, one, I had a lot of relatives in Paris and I wanted to be with them and I didn't want to be in the provinces. I wanted to be in Paris. So I was able to talk Wash U into allowing me to go to the Sorbonne and that was fabulous.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you live with relatives?
- Ellen Mocerri: No, I lived with a French girl from Toulouse, a wonderful young lady who took up with an Algerian and her parents completely disavowed her and she never spoke to them again.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, my! Is she still in Paris?
- Ellen Mocerri: No, no, she lives, I think, in Nantes. So it was wonderful. I mean, Paris is an education unto itself. It's, to me, the most beautiful city in the world and the French culture is the French culture.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you cook or did you get the carry-outs or did you go to the bistro?
- Ellen Mocerri: Oh, mostly you went to the student cafeteria but you saved your money and on occasion you would go to a restaurant but you didn't go to a restaurant all the time, and I would go to lunch at my great aunt's every Wednesday and have a four-course lunch and it was fabulous, yes.
- Blanche Touhill: Are you a French cook?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, yes, I love French food.

Blanche Touhill: Did you learn from your grandmother?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, I did, mm-hmm. The secret to French cooking is sauces and so I can do sauces. I got sauces down.

Blanche Touhill: Does your family like the sauces?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, they do.

Blanche Touhill: And has your daughter or your son...

Ellen Mocerri: Son, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Has your son learned how to cook the sauces?

Ellen Mocerri: No, my husband's Italian and my son is an Italian cook. He does all kinds of pastas, yeah, so he does that. He's not into sauces; they're a little too delicate for him but he likes heavy pasta.

Blanche Touhill: Did your husband stay at U City?

Ellen Mocerri: No, he went from there to Parkway North and he became chair of the English department and did a great, great job.

Blanche Touhill: And that school system just grew like Topsy.

Ellen Mocerri: Like Thompson and he took early retirement after 30 years and that's when I could leave Burroughs, on my quest to become a head of school.

Blanche Touhill: Who was the head of Whitfield when you were there?

Ellen Mocerri: Mr. Barnes and Mr. Cole, two unmarried old men and lovely, charming people. It was a farmhouse when I was there.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I knew it was a very small school.

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, very small and it was a farmhouse, charming as could be but it wasn't where I knew I was going to spend my educational career, yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you go to Burroughs. Talk about Burroughs.

- Ellen Mocerri: Well, Burroughs was really wonderful because whatever I could think to do I could do, meaning, if I thought I wanted to teach a certain kind of course, I could.
- Blanche Touhill: You could create the course?
- Ellen Mocerri: I could create the course. The course I created that was the most popular, and probably the most popular in their school was called Russian Studies – Honors and it was a combination of Russian history, Russian literature, economics, sociology.
- Blanche Touhill: And what years was that?
- Ellen Mocerri: I went there in 1965 and I left in 1993.
- Blanche Touhill: And you always sort of specialized in this Russian course?
- Ellen Mocerri: Russian, I taught; I taught African history, which I love because one of my favorite professors at Wash U was very big into African history; I taught women's politics; I taught AP American history. I taught, really, whatever I liked. That was kind of the neat thing about it, yes, and then I was interested in college counseling so I became a director of college counseling and I loved that because that was a way of helping kids develop their aspirations and figure out what was best for them and to work closely with parents. I very much enjoyed that.
- Blanche Touhill: What were some of the matches that you made when you counseled?
- Ellen Mocerri: Well, one year I had six kids who went to Yale, which was an unusual accomplishment. Most of my kids were Eastern-oriented.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, they were?
- Ellen Mocerri: Very few of them wanted to stay in the Midwest and very few went West to school. So it was really kind of a Northeastern quest: Ivy League schools: MIT...but then along the whole seaboard, like Wake Forest and UVA and that kind of thing but they were fairly Eastern-oriented. It was interesting.
- Blanche Touhill: Did they come back to St. Louis?
- Ellen Mocerri: Some.

Blanche Touhill: Out of 100, how many came back to St. Louis?

Ellen Mocerri: Oh, I'd say maybe 60.

Blanche Touhill: And some of them probably went into family businesses?

Ellen Mocerri: Oh, absolutely, that's the thing with St. Louis. I mean, there are so many family businesses. Now, the difference between Burroughs and, say, MICDS is MICDS had a lot of kids whose parents were in business in St. Louis. Burroughs was more of what I'd call the professional community: the doctors; the lawyers, and so the kids really didn't have, in the same way, a family business to come back to as they certainly do from MICDS. It's two different kinds of cultures.

Blanche Touhill: How were the other teachers at Burroughs?

Ellen Mocerri: They're very good. They're all going to do their own thing and that's the good news and the bad news because getting people to cooperate wasn't all that easy because people were very convinced that what they were doing is what they were doing and then that was it but very professional, very intellectual, very high standards, worked with the kids, spent an awful lot of time with the kids, graded papers on time, offered a lot of outside activities. I developed the International Model UN. I developed Aim High, which is a program...

Blanche Touhill: What's Aim High?

Ellen Mocerri: Aim High is a program for elementary school kids in the inner city and it's a summer program of intellectual, artistic, cultural enrichment and the purpose is to help these kids get into the best programs in high school that they can and graduate from high school but the teaching assistants in the program come from John Burroughs. Half the teachers came from the public schools; the other half from the surrounding areas. So it's a wonderful, wonderful program.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have success with them?

Ellen Mocerri: Very much so, and I was only there for three years after I started it but after the first year, I was able to get it to go to Priory so now it's at Burroughs and it's a Priory. I'd like, now that I'm back, to get it to go to other independent schools.

Blanche Touhill: So that's your project in your retirement?

Ellen Mocerri: That's one of my main projects. I'd love for others to do it.

Blanche Touhill: How many students did you take to each place?

Ellen Mocerri: I think Burroughs has 320.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my!

Ellen Mocerri: Yeah, and I think Priory has 200. My dream was for every independent school...10 independent schools to do 300 and then we could reach 3,000 kids.

Blanche Touhill: When they go to a good high school, does somebody follow them?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Who follows them?

Ellen Mocerri: They have kind of a mentor in the program when they start the program.

Blanche Touhill: At the school that they attend?

Ellen Mocerri: No, from the program, from Aim High, and then they are followed by those people throughout their career. Some of them go to independent schools but some of them go to charter schools, magna schools, whatever, but the purpose is that they will graduate from high school.

Blanche Touhill: And go to...

Ellen Mocerri: And go to college, absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: Do they follow them in college as well?

Ellen Mocerri: I don't know that they've gotten that far. They should, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: There is a program in St. Louis, Access Academy.

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, I've heard of it.

Blanche Touhill: And that is sort of built on that same idea except they do it during the school year.

Ellen Mocerri: Yes.

- Blanche Touhill: They go into a school. Have you talked to them?
- Ellen Mocerri: No, not yet, I haven't been home long enough to do that. But when I was at Burroughs, I had a sabbatical at Columbia University...
- Blanche Touhill: In New York.
- Ellen Mocerri: In New York and I was on their Admissions committee because, as a college counselor, I wanted to see the other side, what they did and what the strategies were. So they let me, for a full year, sit on their committee. While I was there, the head of school at Burroughs said, "Well, Ellen, why don't you take an education course at Teachers College," which I had never done and I said, "Oh, come on, I'm beyond an education course. I don't need it"; "No, no, no, go up there." So I took a course that really changed my life, Blanche. It was called Private Schools Have a Public Purpose, and it taught me that our independence was...this is why I came home and started Aim High...because we have so many resources and we really have to use them in a way that serves the public and we can. I mean, there's no reason not to and I wish more people would do that and I guess my mission in life is to try to get people to do that. When I was in Miami, the Aim High program there was called Breakthrough, same kind of program and I was able to get a 3.6 million dollar grant from the Knight Foundation.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, from the Knight Foundation.
- Ellen Mocerri: And we were able to expand the program to 1,000 students at five different independent schools there.
- Blanche Touhill: In New York?
- Ellen Mocerri: No, no, in Miami.
- Blanche Touhill: I'm sorry, but you were the head of school in Miami, I remember, yes.
- Ellen Mocerri: Right, right, yes.
- Blanche Touhill: Does that still go on?
- Ellen Mocerri: Yes, oh, yes, it's been going on for 20 years. It was there when I got there and I was able to expand it but also when I was at Columbia, I had started work on my doctoral degree in Ed Admin and was part of an inquiry

program there in Teachers College. I love Teachers College; it's great, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Did you finish?

Ellen Mocerri: No, I finished all the course work.

Blanche Touhill: But you haven't written the dissertation?

Ellen Mocerri: I investigated two different dissertations when I was abroad. I was head of the Upper School of the American School of the Hague and so while I was there, I decided I wanted to investigate whether or not requiring community service was a good thing; in other words, once you require it, does it denigrate it, and so I went to four different IB schools to talk about it because they require community service, to see how it went and found that, in fact, it's a very good thing to do because if you organize it well, it orients kids to think in those terms but I came back and became a head of school and never had the time to write it. The second one that I wanted to do was to look at innovation in independent schools and so I became head of something called the Independent Schools Innovation Consortium and I went around to 20 independent schools, most of them boarding schools, to see what had been their innovations and how did they get the innovation and how was it sustained and I found that...first of all, there were very few innovations in independent schools, but secondly, if they weren't promoted by and sustained by the head of school, they didn't remain. So it required that the leadership really got behind any innovation if it were to be sustained. But then I became head of another school, Blanche, and so I've never written but I learned a lot from those dissertations.

Blanche Touhill: I think all those are good topics and if you didn't write a dissertation, I think they'd be nice books.

Ellen Mocerri: Yeah, you know, in my retirement, I might do that, yes; I might do that.

Blanche Touhill: So then, when did you decide that you wanted to be a head of school?

Ellen Mocerri: Well, I kind of always knew I wanted to be a head of school eventually but we have to say, there's a glass ceiling for women to become heads of school and most women who become heads of school...and I'm not denigrating this...but they become head of K-8 schools because that's

where women belong, you know, and so to be the head of a K-12 school or a 6-12 school is an unusual thing. I have to say, in my lifetime, once I became a professional, my greatest mentors were men because, frankly, there weren't women in those leadership positions to be my mentors. So fortunately my head of school at John Burroughs, Keith Shehan, became my mentor. When I told him I wanted to be a head of school, he supported me in that and helped me do that. But I had to leave Burroughs because he wasn't going anywhere. So, at 50, like Peggy Lee, I woke up and I said, is this all there is and decided I didn't want to just cruise out my career at Burroughs and so I had to leave and the first thing I did was to become a head of the upper school. If you want to be a head of school, you've got to have been head of an upper school somewhere along the line. So I went over to the American School of the Hague and then from there...

Blanche Touhill:

How was that?

Ellen Mocerri:

Oh, it was great; it was interesting. It was fascinating. First of all, it was an American school but it had a Dutch mentality and so the teachers were very much in a socialist union concept which was not fun to deal with at all. So, it was American kind of in name only. It was also very insular. It was an AP school; it wasn't an IB school and in the international world, the IB is a fantastic curriculum so if you're not an IB school, you're not seen as excellent as other schools.

Blanche Touhill:

Were the classes taught in English?

Ellen Mocerri:

Oh, yes.

Blanche Touhill:

But the teachers were mainly...

Ellen Mocerri:

No, there were some Dutch, mostly Americans.

Blanche Touhill:

But the culture of the Dutch.

Ellen Mocerri:

The culture was Dutch.

Blanche Touhill:

And the student body?

Ellen Mocerri:

The student body was mostly American. These were mostly oil executives whose children were there: Shell Oil, which is, of course, based in the Netherlands, yes, so they were mostly oil people from Texas. It was

fascinating. So I was there a year and I made it into an IB school and then I went to Horace Mann in New York City and became head of their upper school for two years.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, and how was that? Very competitive?

Ellen Mocerri: Unbelievably competitive in not a very nice way, not a nice way.

Blanche Touhill: With the students and the faculty?

Ellen Mocerri: The kids were cutthroat and...I don't know where this is going, Blanche, but the kids were fairly cutthroat. The faculty was fairly cutthroat. I mean, being nice to one another was not high on their hit parade. Bright kids, hardworking...

Blanche Touhill: And they were all trying to get into the very top schools?

Ellen Mocerri: Oh, absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: So they were not friendly...the students weren't friendly to each other either, I'll bet?

Ellen Mocerri: No, they were very competitive, very competitive.

Blanche Touhill: Unless you had a small group that was cooperating.

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, yes, and it was interesting because my best friend there was the director of college counseling and he'd call me at 3:00 o'clock in the morning and say, "Ellen, this happened. What are we going to do?" I mean, it's tense, very tense, which is why I loved finally coming to Ransom Everglades.

Blanche Touhill: Now, that's Miami?

Ellen Mocerri: That's Miami.

Blanche Touhill: But that was your last spot?

Ellen Mocerri: That's my last spot.

Blanche Touhill: Let's not talk about it...

Ellen Mocerri: We're not there yet, okay, all right.

Blanche Touhill: So after Horace Mann...

Ellen Mocerri: So after Horace Mann...

Blanche Touhill: How many students did Horace Mann have?

Ellen Mocerri: It was a K-12 school and I think it had about 1,600.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, that's big.

Ellen Mocerri: Yeah. It had, like, 200 a class in the upper school.

Blanche Touhill: And what was the tuition, do you remember?

Ellen Mocerri: Predominant, it was predominantly a Jewish school.

Blanche Touhill: No, no, I meant the money, the cost.

Ellen Mocerri: Oh, the tuition? The tuition was, at that time...

Blanche Touhill: This was the '90s.

Ellen Mocerri: I don't remember. I know what it is today. It's about \$48,000 today.

Blanche Touhill: A year?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And does that include books?

Ellen Mocerri: No.

Blanche Touhill: That's the tuition?

Ellen Mocerri: That's the tuition, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: So where did you go from Horace Mann?

Ellen Mocerri: So, from Horace Mann, I decided I had done my kind of penance as the head of an upper school. I learned all I needed to learn and now I wanted to be a head of school. So I became head of Christ Episcopal School in Greenville, South Carolina. Now, Greenville is Northern South Carolina and it's very international because it has several different plants from different countries. It has a BMW plant; it has a (META?) plant and so it has a lot of international students and has several French compatriots. So I was able to make that school into the first K-12 IB school in the country.

Blanche Touhill: And when you say "IB," what do you mean?

- Ellen Mocerri: International Baccalaureate, yes, but there had been no school that was primary, middle school and upper school IB so we became the first and it was quite helpful. Michelin sent their kids there; BMW sent their kids there; META did, because they weren't going to be there forever.
- Blanche Touhill: No, and they had to transfer to another IB school?
- Ellen Mocerri: Thank you...and then they could go back to Europe and go to an IB school and life was good. So it was a very smart thing to do financially but also intellectually, it was perfect.
- Blanche Touhill: Is that mainly curriculum?
- Ellen Mocerri: Yes, it's mainly curriculum. It's a thinking curriculum.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, okay. You're not teaching to the test. You want them to know how to think, and critical thinking?
- Ellen Mocerri: Yes, absolutely, that's what it's all about.
- Blanche Touhill: And the teachers bought in?
- Ellen Mocerri: Oh, absolutely, but they had to learn a different way of teaching and they had to learn not so much to deliver information but how to ask good questions and to get kids to interact.
- Blanche Touhill: And they were willing to do that?
- Ellen Mocerri: Yes, they became willing.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, if you can get one or two to start...
- Ellen Mocerri: Yes. Well, I had enough people who knew that that was kind of necessary. The enrollment of the school had been dropping and so when you can create a sense of urgency like, "Well, if we don't do this, what are we going to do and what's going to happen?" you can get people to open their minds. If they're sailing right along and they don't perceive any problems, often they're not willing to make any changes but because they had this international population...and they were worried that they were going to lose them to Spartanburg or some other little town that they could go to, so I was able to get them to do it, and it changed the whole school, I have to say, and it's still there today so I knew it was a good transplant.

Blanche Touhill: And they have good enrollments?

Ellen Mocerri: They have very good enrollment, yes. But the rector of the church was a born again Christian Episcopalian. I'm an Episcopalian but I'm not a born again Christian Episcopalian. I mean, I read the Bible and I interpret it for myself and I don't need anyone else to tell me what it means and so he and I did not get along very well. So then I left and I became head of the American School Foundation in Mexico City.

Blanche Touhill: How many years were you in South Carolina?

Ellen Mocerri: Three.

Blanche Touhill: So you go on to Mexico City?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Did you speak Spanish?

Ellen Mocerri: No, no, I spoke French but no Spanish. They wanted someone to help them become an IB school.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, so you were the one.

Ellen Mocerri: I was the one, but I have to say, Blanche, I should have read my contract more carefully because it said, "You will be provided with a driver/bodyguard" and I thought, oh, bodyguard, what does that mean? Well, it means what it says, "body guard" and it was quite frightening. My kids would come to school with their guides and their guards and they would have armored cars and they would stay outside and wait for them and then take them home in the armored car. It was harrowing. The school was 70% Mexican but it was the billionaires of Mexico, not the millionaires, the billionaires of Mexico, which there are many and they were unsafe. I mean, they were kidnapping objects, easily so. The thing I was proudest about that I did there...I did help them become an IB school but the school was run by American ex-pats who dominated but they weren't very good at dominating. They only did it because they were Americans; that was all, and so I told them they had to put Mexicans on their board because they had no Mexicans on the board.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness, yes.

Ellen Mocerri: None, in a school that was 70% Mexican.

Blanche Touhill: So, did they do that?

Ellen Mocerri: Yeah, they did but my husband and I, we left at the end of the year, in May, because he was held up at gun point on the Avenue Masarique which is the fifth avenue of Mexico City and he just said, "This is too unsafe for me; I'm going home." I said, "Well, I'm coming with you. I'm not staying here by myself." At that time, Ransom Everglades was looking for a head because they had fired their head and so they were at the end of the year and I came as an interim head in June and the rest was history. I stayed there 13 years.

Blanche Touhill: And what did you do for them?

Ellen Mocerri: Well, I was their head of school and I...

Blanche Touhill: Were they IB or did they...

Ellen Mocerri: No, no...

Blanche Touhill: And they didn't want to be?

Ellen Mocerri: And they shouldn't have been because the IB...if you've already achieved a certain level of academic excellence...IB is great but you don't need to do that in order to raise the level of your school. So they had that and plus, the kids did too many different activities and IB, you can't do too many activities. Like, for instance, you can't be a three-season varsity athlete or anything like that; you don't have time to do that. So, those kids would not have liked that because they were into everything and they did a lot of community service. So, I would say what I did for them: one, I made them into a Harkness Method school.

Blanche Touhill: What does that mean?

Ellen Mocerri: A Harkness Method is a form of pedagogy where in the classroom, you sit around a table. It started in Exeter and Andover and you sit around an oval table and the faculty member is just one of the participants around the oval table and the faculty member's role is to ask good questions and to have the kids interact and discuss and solve problems.

Blanche Touhill: So they read something ahead of time and then they come...

Ellen Mocerri: They read something ahead of time and then they are asked about it and comment on it and bring in whatever ideas and other information.

Blanche Touhill: There's no hiding in the back of the room?

Ellen Mocerri: Oh, no, you can't. You have to be in...and if you don't participate, that's part of your grade, so you have to be engaged. It's an engaging kind of pedagogy because when I got there...this was interesting, Blanche...the first day that I visited classes at Ransom Everglades, it was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and the kids were all seated very narrowly in rows and the teacher was in the front and it was the day after 9/11 and so he asked the question, he said, "What happened to the flight over Pennsylvania? How was it that they downed the plane?" Well, as it turned out, they downed the plane by voting democratically to down the plane, this is a democratic process and I thought, wow, what a great discussion of what democracy is for a people who culturally believe in it, but the kids were all seated in these rows and they couldn't see each other and so there was no engagement or interaction. I said, man, this has got to go; we can't have this pedagogy. It's so outmoded. So I brought a completely different pedagogy.

Blanche Touhill: And how did the faculty react?

Ellen Mocerri: Some of them, that was their natural way of teaching anyway, but for many of them, it was not...and I sent them to training at Exeter. Exeter, every summer, has a summer institute on how to do Harkness Method teaching. So I sent them there and then I had Exeter come to Ransom Everglades and so everybody got involved in it and once they got involved in it, they loved doing it.

Blanche Touhill: How many years did that take, two or three?

Ellen Mocerri: I'd say four years. You change the culture of a school in four to five years, yes and they can change it back in four to five years but, no, it's in place.

Blanche Touhill: Well, it's not as easy to change...I mean...

Ellen Mocerri: It doesn't happen in a year, no, it does not. What else did I do? Well, I completely rebuilt the campus. The middle school campus was what I would call a gentile poverty. It was horrible and so we built five new buildings and new fields and upper school, we built all new athletic facilities and now they're in the master plan for the academic facilities.

Blanche Touhill: So you have a master plan and you just followed that as you got money?

Ellen Mocerri: No, I created. There wasn't one.

Blanche Touhill: No, but I mean, once you got it...

Ellen Mocerri: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And you knew, in time, what it would look like at the end?

Ellen Mocerri: Right, exactly, yes.

Blanche Touhill: Because people give to one thing but they won't give to another and I'm assuming that you had to raise the money...

Ellen Mocerri: Had to raise the money.

Blanche Touhill: ...from the community?

Ellen Mocerri: And we had the most successful capital campaign that we've ever had so that was great.

Blanche Touhill: How did you do that?

Ellen Mocerri: Well, you call up the people in the community who care about the community and you say, "Look, this is a school that's not just good for these kids, but it's good for the community."

Blanche Touhill: Well, see, I know that that's what universities do but I didn't know that high schools and grade schools could do that as well but you were able to do that.

Ellen Mocerri: Independent schools can and should do that.

Blanche Touhill: I know, but do they?

Ellen Mocerri: No, probably not.

Blanche Touhill: They don't. They concentrate on their alums and the students who are currently in the school and they don't call attention to the local business?

Ellen Mocerri: Exactly.

Blanche Touhill: Or the community as a whole, what they contribute.

Ellen Mocerri: Exactly.

Blanche Touhill: Now, that's something to write on.

- Ellen Mocerri: We went to our alums, we went to certainly present parents, but we also went to leaders in Miami. You see, the University of Miami Medical School, the Miller School of Medicine, they would send 30 of their children of their professors to our school every year and the dean of Medicine would say, "Look, if it weren't for Ransom Everglades, we could not attract talent to the Miller School of Medicine because they can choose the best schools in the country to go to and if we don't have one of them, they're not coming here for their kids." So we were able to show in the community what an asset we are to Miami, how they're able to attract talent to Miami, because the people who come have a school like Ransom to go to.
- Blanche Touhill: When you say 30 a year, does that mean that at one point there might be 30, 60, 90, 120?
- Ellen Mocerri: Oh, no, no, no.
- Blanche Touhill: Just 30 a year, total?
- Ellen Mocerri: Yes, and it's not a set number but that's an average. So that community is involved. Also, we got very involved in the community.
- Blanche Touhill: How did you do that?
- Ellen Mocerri: Well, because I believe private schools have a public purpose. We opened our facilities to a lot of civic organizations.
- Blanche Touhill: They could have meetings?
- Ellen Mocerri: They could have meetings; they could use our classrooms; they could use our athletic facilities; they could use our auditorium and our theater, nominal price. We were trying to make money, we just wanted to share our resources and that made us very popular. When I left, the last thing I had to do at Ransom Everglades was go before the city commission to get the final three buildings approved for the upper school and the head of the city commission and the mayor said, "We would pass this because of Ransom Everglades, because you all have done so much for the community." So, when you become known as a community giver, people are much more willing to give to you.
- Blanche Touhill: How did you get the idea?

Ellen Mocerri: From the course basically that I took at Teachers College. I mean, I had it but it hadn't gelled, it hadn't gelled but when I went to that course, I came back and looked at schools in a different way, looked at these resources, how can we not share this with the community? And you can't try to make money from everything, you know what I mean? You have to share.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have a summer program?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, we have a summer camp at Ransom Everglades, a summer program and then we have Breakthrough in the summer, which is the Aim High, so those two programs, and then we would have summer sports camps. Oh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: So you kept it operating all year round?

Ellen Mocerri: Oh, we're a 24/7 organization, yes, constantly. We had ballet companies from many schools come use our theater. We had symphonies come and use our theater. We had the best small theater in South Florida, sat 1000 people so it was wonderful.

Blanche Touhill: How far were you from Miami?

Ellen Mocerri: Coconut Grove is five miles from Miami.

Blanche Touhill: So a lot of the students came from Miami?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: The Miami area anyway.

Ellen Mocerri: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: I want to change the subject for just a bit and then I'll get back to our main focus. If you had been born 50 years earlier, what do you think your life would have been like?

Ellen Mocerri: That's a good question because I was born in '43 so I would have been born at the turn of the century or slightly before that and I don't know. I don't know what...I know my family because of their dedication to education. I know I would have been educated. I don't know if I would have gone to college. I know I would have gone to high school. I would have sought to go to college but I don't know...1890, I don't know,

doubtful. But my family believed in education so, like my grandmother, my grandmother went to high school. She did not go to college.

Blanche Touhill: So you would have married and had children?

Ellen Mocerri: I would have probably done the convention thing. I would have married and had children. I think I would have been a volunteer par excellence. I think I would have wanted to help people in some fashion. That's just who I am.

Blanche Touhill: Did you get any award or awards that you really do prize?

Ellen Mocerri: Well, when I left Miami, they declared "Ellen Mocerri: Day," March the 15<sup>th</sup> which I thought was charming of them. Breakthrough gave me the Leadership of the Year Award for all the Breakthrough programs in the United States, which was great. The Children's Bereavement Center, which was housed at Ransom Everglades declared me...they had, like, the Friend of the Year, so I was their Friend of the Year. I was in honorary societies at Wash U the sophomore and junior honorary societies. Then I left to go to...I wasn't in Mortar Board because I left for a year and you had to be continually there, so I went to Paris instead but I was on track to be in that. I can't think of anything else.

Blanche Touhill: And would you like to comment about the IWF?

Ellen Mocerri: Mm-hmm, I think it's a wonderful organization. I love the women in IWF. I was attracted to it because of some of the women in Miami who said, "Well, Ellen, you're leading this great school. You've got to be a part of this," so I joined them. Also, one of the women in it who was one of the head IWF'ers was the woman who wrote the 100-year history of our school, Arva Marie Parks, and so she said, "Well, you've got to be a member," and I was just intrigued by the level of things that these women did. I mean, they were professionals, yes, but they were professionals who wanted to better their communities. It wasn't just careerism; it was careerism but careerism with a purpose beyond making money or anything of that sort. So I always loved the various things they were involved in. There were judges and there were senators and there were doctors, just people who made a huge difference in the community and I would bond with them on projects I was working on or they would bond with me on projects they wanted me to help them with. I always liked the collegiality of it and I love, the two times that I've been involved

with the IWF here, since I've been, I went to hear about the grants that are given by Ginger (Imster?), the Arch Grants, and I was fascinated by that and then the dinner last night was wonderful. I think here, the level of intellectual discussion is higher than Miami. Miami is a little more me-ism: "This is what I'm doing"; "This is what I'm doing." Here, I find women talk about that but I thought last night's discussion was great about a lot of current issues, world politics, economy, whatever, which I thought was fascinating.

Blanche Touhill: Let's go back then to your life. Your husband then went with you, when you went to be head of school, your husband went along?

Ellen Mocerri: He did and I have to give him a lot of credit because a lot of men will not follow the woman around. The woman is the one who follows the man around. He took early retirement. Both of my parents had died; both of his parents had died; our son had graduated from college, and so he said, "Okay, I'll follow you around" but basically he uprooted himself from his native city, St. Louis. He left a home he loved in Webster Groves, a beautiful home.

Blanche Touhill: Did you sell it?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes, and went around the world. Now, he will say to you we had a much more interesting life because of it. Had we stayed in St. Louis, we wouldn't have been such interesting people as we are. In fact, I must say, I once came back for an engagement party with one of my friends and I said, "Oh, my God, those people are wearing the same thing and saying the same things they said 15 years ago. This is frightening." So I think he would say that it broadened our perspective and then that made us better people.

Blanche Touhill: I know that you've traveled with students overseas...

Ellen Mocerri: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Will you talk a little bit about that?

Ellen Mocerri: Sure. Well, I started the International Model UN at John Burroughs so I would take kids over to the Hague.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful!

- Ellen Mocerri: Oh, it was great and that's how I got to know the Hague and love the Hague.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you go to the courts?
- Ellen Mocerri: Yes, oh, yeah, we did everything. It was great and the kids loved it. Over there you can drink at a much earlier age so would have to have very strict rules. But I loved it. The kids enjoyed it. It was so mind-expanding for them. Then, when I taught Russian Studies, the last year I was there, I took a group of my graduates to the Soviet Union then. It was the year before it became the non-Soviet Union or whatever, and it was fascinating because we went to two parts of Russia. We went to Western Russia and then we went to Muslim Russia and we went to Uzbekistan and Bukhara and it was fascinating, just fascinating.
- Blanche Touhill: Were the women in veils?
- Ellen Mocerri: No, no, no, the Soviets did not allow that.
- Blanche Touhill: That's right, they...
- Ellen Mocerri: They would not. I mean, that to me was wonderful because women were treated as equals even though they were Muslim women and so you had to say a lot for that because the Soviets had a lot of issues but, one, they weren't going to allow a male/female inequality.
- Blanche Touhill: What has happened now, do you know? Have they gone back to the veils?
- Ellen Mocerri: I don't know. Yesterday or last evening, Ann Ruwitch was describing a trip that she had taken to Uzbekistan and how whole areas of it were walled off.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, that's right, she did talk about that.
- Ellen Mocerri: Yes, and I didn't quite under...
- Blanche Touhill: And then, unless you had somebody leading the way, you really would miss a lot.
- Ellen Mocerri: Yes, and so I didn't really understand what exactly had happened there because when I was there, you could walk everywhere. The mosques were just gorgeous, I mean, beautiful turquoise-colored tile. It was really

quite interesting and to go from Leningrad, then...not St. Petersburg...Leningrad then, to Tashkent or Bukhara. It was just fascinating. It was two different worlds, no question about it.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and the Russian Orthodox churches in Russia.

Ellen Mocerri: Oh, gorgeous, well, the Kremlin, the whole Kremlin is made up of churches, yeah, so it's beautiful, yeah, and I was amazed at this: how much the Communists, the Soviets had done to redo, like, the Winter Palace and the Hermitage. I mean, they wanted to redo the monuments to affluence in Russia, which they did.

Blanche Touhill: And to the monarchy.

Ellen Mocerri: And to the monarchy...fascinating. I was very dismayed, however, by the condition of the Hermitage Museum because they didn't have climate control and you could walk in front of a Van Gogh painting and you could see the paint just kind of crumbling at the floor because it wasn't treated as it should have been. I'm sure they fixed that now, but, no, I love to take kids on adventuresome things. I like to open my own mind and I like to open theirs.

Blanche Touhill: How did that international world affect you when you went to Florida, because when I think of Miami, it's an international city these days.

Ellen Mocerri: It is, and my school was basically an international school in an American city. Forty-six percent of my students were Hispanic, South American Hispanic, not Mexicans. We don't have many Mexicans living there and not really Cubans because the Cubans send their kids to Catholic schools. So we had Brazilian, Argentinean, Peruvian, Chilean. It was like the United Nations. I mean, it was fabulous, and then we had many Haitians. There are not many Asians in Miami but whatever population we had, they were there and so it was just an incredible multi-cultural mix. Miami is a very international city, very. When you get off the airplane in the airport, you hear Spanish. Everything is translated into Spanish.

Blanche Touhill: And it's an international hub. It goes into Latin America.

Ellen Mocerri: Well, Miami is really the capital of South America. People need to realize it.

Blanche Touhill: Why do you say that?

Ellen Mocerri: Well, because most of the South American countries have banks in Miami and there's a huge amount of export/import trade and a whole lot of South American money comes to Miami, and a lot of South American families move to Miami because they don't feel safe in Venezuela or whatever and they bring their kids to come to Ransom Everglades because they know they're going to be safe. It's a fascinating town, just fascinating.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about your son?

Ellen Mocerri: Sure.

Blanche Touhill: Did he appreciate the fact you were working and you looked at life differently?

Ellen Mocerri: Oh, I think he did. My son is very thoughtful, very verbal, very articulate. He loves history. He loves to read. He loves to talk about the issues of the day. He's 43, but a lot of young people, that's not their interest but it really is his and you can tell he's grown up in a family that cares about that and he has an incredible vocabulary. He's just extremely thoughtful and articulate. I think he loved the internationalism. He went to Kobai but he spent his senior year in London and he went as part of the school's exchange program. I mean, he loved London and he loved European history. He loves to read all about that and that really infused in him that sense and we took him to Europe two or three times when he was a young kid and it just took on him. So he has an international outlook.

Blanche Touhill: Did he ever comment on the fact you were one of the few women head of schools in the independent schools?

Ellen Mocerri: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: What did he say?

Ellen Mocerri: I think he's very proud of what I've done. He knows how difficult it is to do. He's seen the issues that I've wrestled with and dealt with and I think he's proud that I did do that and he also knows, because of his friends, the impact that I've had on students' lives and how I've helped change their lives to some extent but he knows that personally from his own experience.

Blanche Touhill: As you look back over your life, are you happy with it?

Ellen Mocerri: I'm very happy with my life.

Blanche Touhill: Why is that?

Ellen Mocerri: Because I think I made a difference. I think I helped people. That's really what I...kids. I love kids. To me, the greatest reward...well, you know this from your own career...is to see kids grow and develop their potential and nothing is more rewarding than that, and have kids come back to you five years later, ten years later and say, "You changed my life" or "You made a difference," or "I remember when you said this and you helped me do that," and "I went to this college." You just think, okay, I helped kids but mostly, I like feeling I infused in them a certain sense of giving to the community, that it is important not to just care about yourself, your career, but to care about the community and I think most of my students, that has taken on them. I'm not sure I like my life right now, Blanche, because I'm retired and I have no idea what that means and I don't like it. So I'm going to have to figure out what I'm going to fill it in with but it's not me, I'm not a...

Blanche Touhill: If you had your wish, what would you do?

Ellen Mocerri: If I had my wish, I would run a school for black students, male or female or both who are at-risk kids but had a desire to do better and I would love to do that. But as a white person, it is hard to accomplish that. You can be on the board of such a school. It's hard to be the head of such a school but I would love to do that.

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much. It was a wonderful conversation and I know you will do something great.

Ellen Mocerri: Well, thank you, Blanche, I appreciate that. I got to do something. Retirement is not me. A month of it was fine and now I'm done. Thank you; thank you very much.